

# “Reading” a Sacred Place Differently: Sarvatīrtha in Kanchipuram’s Sanskrit *Māhātmyas*<sup>1</sup>

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Sarvatīrtha is the largest constructed temple tank in the South Indian temple town of Kanchipuram (Kanchi). It is a *tīrtha*, a body of water. *Tīrthas* have been used for ritual bathing since ancient times and are often credited with both purifying and redemptive powers. Many temples therefore encompass a *tīrtha* in their precincts for the devotees to take a ritual bath before visiting the deity. As sacred places, *tīrthas* are linked to other sacred places as part of a sacred landscape, which connects mythology with the natural landscape (Eck 2012). The study of mythological stories about sacred places thus promises to reveal a variety of notions about a local sacred landscape in which the places are situated.

Mythological stories about the origin and ascribed powers of the sacred place Sarvatīrtha are detailed in Sanskrit texts of praise (*māhātmyas*) on Kanchi. This contribution will explore the narratives about Sarvatīrtha from three *māhātmyas* both text-immanently and cross-textually. The focus will be on the spatial positioning of the place within the texts’ understanding of Kanchi’s sacred landscape and the contextualisation of the narratives with regard to the texts’ overall orientation and structure. Before I turn to study Sarvatīrtha from these perspectives, I will first introduce the usage of the term *tīrtha*, the location of Sarvatīrtha and Kanchi’s *māhātmyas*.

## The Term *Tīrtha*

In its narrow sense, “*tīrtha*” denotes a sacred place that is a body of water, such as a temple basin, lake or river. My *māhātmya* sources use the term in this way and I adopt it for easier understanding. Hence, the designation Sarvatīrtha itself refers to the defining characteristic of the place as a body of water while at the same time constituting its proper name.

The broader understanding of the term *tīrtha* encompasses sacred places of various kinds. Accordingly, they can, for example, be a pond, a hill, a city, a temple, or a local representation of a particular deity. Often these sacred places are connected

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with water in some form, such as a temple basin or river. As Knut Jacobsen states, the association of a sacred place with water agrees with the understanding of the term *tīrtha* in earlier, pre-Purāṇic literature. It is based on the literal understanding of the word *tīrtha* as “ford,” or “crossing.” Places where one could cross water, sites associated with water and places for ritual bathing were in particular called *tīrtha* (Jacobsen 2013, 22). Later, in the Purāṇic literature, *tīrtha* rather refers to a place of transition, also on a spiritual level, where the presence of deities is more intense and rituals are more effective (Eck 2012, 7). Moreover, the aspect of transcendence may refer to the promised redemptive qualities of *tīrthas*, whereby people are supposed to not be reborn in the future after a visit there (possibly including performing certain rituals on site, for example a ritual bath) (Jacobsen 2013, 9). It further points to sacred sites being places for pilgrimage due to their ascribed ability to grant liberation.<sup>2</sup>

### Sarvatīrtha in Kanchi’s Geography and History

As a sacred place, Sarvatīrtha is one of many in Kanchi. Since ancient times, this city has been a centre of many religious traditions, learning and power. Within its densely populated ritual space, Buddhist, Jain, Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Śākta traditions have cooperated and disputed each other, thus shaping the religious landscape of this place (Rao 2008, 18–29). The changing relationships of these traditions and their representatives are expressed and negotiated in a multitude of mythological stories on Kanchi, in its historiography, and in the various ritual traditions (Hüsken 2017, 68ff.).

The area (*kṣetra*) of Kanchi is considered to be continuously sacred, sanctified by the presence of a multitude of deities. Countless monumental temples and small shrines of different eras mark the city. The older among them date back to Kanchi’s time as capital of the Pallava dynasty (third–ninth century CE), and many more were built under the Cholas (tenth–thirteenth century) and the Vijayanagara emperors (fourteenth–seventeenth century).<sup>3</sup> Particularly well known are the city’s three largest temples, the Ekāmrānātha temple (Śiva), the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple (Viṣṇu), and the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple, one of the most important temples for the Goddess in India. As we will see, the narratives from the *māhātmyas* link Sarvatīrtha particularly to one of these places and its deity.

2 For a discussion of various designations for “sacred place” as adapted to different characteristics, see Jacobsen 2013, 8–10.

3 See Stein 2017 and in this volume, Minakshi 1954 and Seshadri 2003 on the art history, and architecture and Srinivasan 1979 for a perspective on the history.

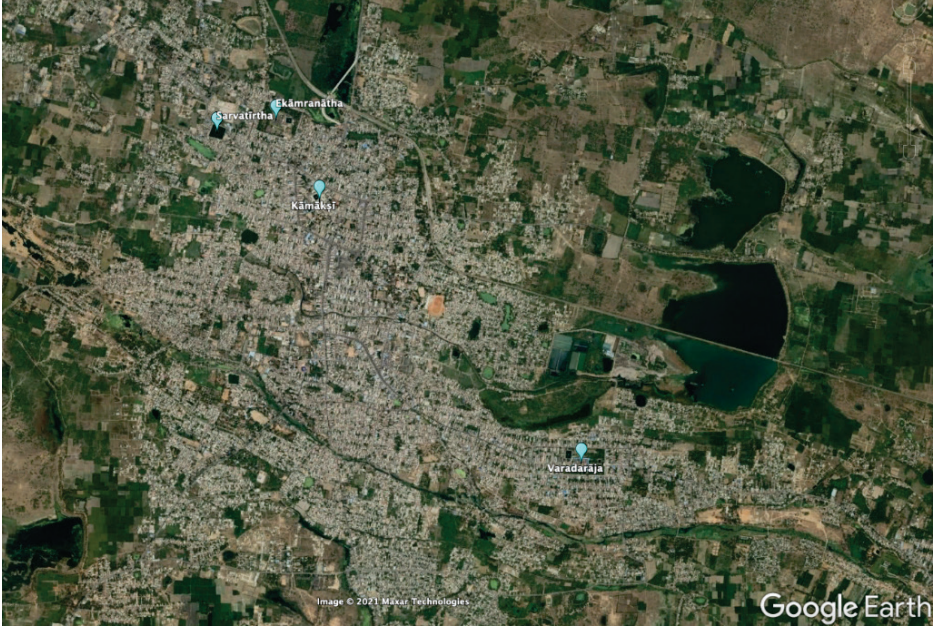


Fig. 1: Map of Kanchi with the Varadarāja Perumāḷ, Kāmākṣī Amman, and Ekāmrānātha temples and Sarvatīrtha.



Fig. 2: Sarvatīrtha (photo by Malini Ambach 2020).

Sarvatīrtha is the largest water basin in Kanchi with the typical physical appearance of a temple tank. It is situated at the north-western limit of today's city and west of the Ekāmranātha temple (see figure 1). The surrounding area is both industrial and residential. At the time of my visit in January 2020, the large basin was in sound shape and filled with water. It is enclosed by walls on all sides. These were painted in bright, not yet worn-off, wide red and white vertical stripes (characteristics that mark South Indian temples). There is a gate in the middle of the walls on each side and neat flights of stairs lead down to the water. A pavilion (*maṇḍapa*) is situated in the middle of the water (see figure 2).

The *tīrtha* is closely connected to the Ekāmranātha temple and seems to be maintained by said temple's administration. On the last festival day of the main annual festival (*mahotsava*; its specific Tamil name is *Paṅkuni Uttiram*) at the Ekāmranātha temple, the morning procession is extended to Sarvatīrtha for a purifying bathing rite (*tīrthasnāna*).<sup>4</sup> It serves the festival deities, priests and others to remove any impurities that might have happened during the daily festival processions (Schier 2018, 34, 65; also Seshadri 2003, 144).

The *tīrtha* is also a part of the main annual festival (*brahmotsava*) of the Varadarāja temple. The procession on the morning of the fifth day with Varadarāja in his incarnation as Mohinī<sup>5</sup> travels up to Sarvatīrtha, which is the farthest point west any procession goes (see figure 3).

In an inscription at this very temple, the Varadarāja temple, a reference to the history of Sarvatīrtha can be found. An inscription dated to the *śāka* year 1645 (1723 CE) tells of an underground aqueduct built from Sarvatīrtha at the north-western end of Kanchi to the Anantasaras temple tank within the Varadarāja temple compound at the other end of the city. The aim was to collect spring water from the nearby river to supply the many temple tanks in the city with water (*Annual Report on Epigraphy* 1920, 123). This indicates that Sarvatīrtha already existed at that time. A. K. Seshadri also supports this assessment: he presumes that Sarvatīrtha was built during the Pallava times (third – ninth century), as the steps and enclosing walls were originally made of sandstone dating from the Pallava period. According to Seshadri, it was only in more recent times that the sandstone walls had been completely replaced by brick ones and a fence had been added to prevent misuse of the tank. He further mentions that the pavilion inside the tank, whose superstructure is embellished with stucco figures, was added in later times (Seshadri 2003, 181f., 192).

4 From 2008 to 2010, Sarvatīrtha was renovated, therefore *tīrthasnāna* was performed at Śiva-gaṅgātīrtha within the Ekāmranātha temple's precincts (Schier 2018, 66, fn. 62).

5 This is a reference to the narrative about the churning of the milk ocean found in various Purāṇas. Viṣṇu manifests in female form as bewitching Mohinī in order to retrieve the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*) from the gods' enemies, the demons (see f. ex. *Bhāgavatapurāna* 8, chapters 8–9).

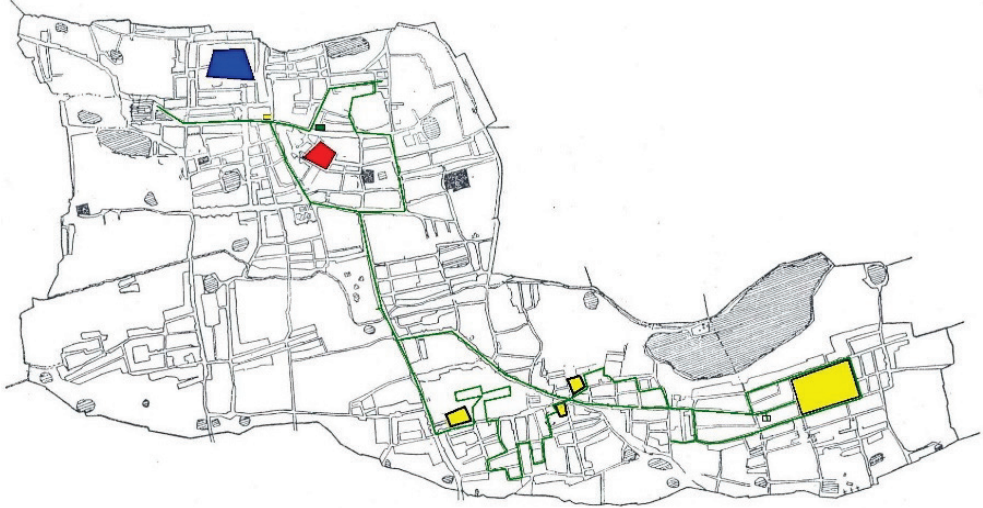


Fig. 3: Map of Varadarāja's Mohini-avatāra procession during *brahmotsava* (by Ute Hüsken, adapted from Porcher 1985).



Fig. 4: Tirtheśvara at Sarvatīrtha (photo by Malini Ambach 2020).





Fig. 5: Map with temples around Sarvatīrtha.

Relying on this analysis of the architectural history of Sarvatīrtha, the tank thus dates back to a rather early origin. Its use in the centuries following its construction cannot be deduced from the sources consulted, until an inscription from the eighteenth century attests to the tank's inclusion in the water supply system of the city's temple tanks. Probably to maintain its usability, Sarvatīrtha has been renovated more than once in the more recent period.

Around the *tīrtha*, in-between workshops and houses and partly hidden behind them, there are several Śiva temples. The majority of these temples are compact walled shrines built around their Śaiva icon, the *liṅga* (see figure 4). Some of them are further enclosed by a wall that runs around a courtyard. A map (in Tamil) of Śaiva and Viṣṇu temples on display various Śaiva temples in Kanchi lists ten (nos. 125–134) temples at the shores of the tank and two more (nos. 135–136) close by.<sup>6</sup> These are (in Sanskrit) Hanumantīśvara, Gaṅgādhareśvara, Yogaliṅgeśvara,

<sup>6</sup> Electronic version available here <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zUipQ8aUU02679YzJswryZk3C-v4nE7o/view> (accessed June 20, 2021). An English rendering can be found here [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B\\_2wE0wmmsqyQXY0VWFMNzdYWLWc/view?resourcekey=0-5bf1OijLfYPPSMF-cR3rdg](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_2wE0wmmsqyQXY0VWFMNzdYWLWc/view?resourcekey=0-5bf1OijLfYPPSMF-cR3rdg) (accessed June 20, 2021).

Lakṣmaṇeśvara, Sīteśvara, Mallikārajneśvara, Rāmanātheśvara, Tīrtheśvara, Hiranyaśvara, Viśvanātheśvara, Kāmeśvara, and Dhavaḷeśvara. Partly with variant names, these shrines can be localised all around the *tīrtha* with the above sequence starting in the east and moving around clockwise<sup>7</sup> (see figure 5). One of the *māhātmya* sources on Kanchi, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, describes six of these *śivaliṅgas* at the shores of the *tīrtha*,<sup>8</sup> and connects the narrative of Sarvatīrtha specifically to one of them.

Taking into account these aspects that we have gathered about the location, history, and use of Sarvatīrtha, we will now turn to the *māhātmya* texts that present their understanding of this place in the form of mythological narratives.

### *Māhātmya* Texts on Kanchi

Descriptions of sacred sites like Sarvatīrtha and their ascribed efficacy are found in works belonging to the genre of Purāṇic Sanskrit *māhātmyas* (glorifications, legends, praise texts). More precisely, a text concerning itself with the creation of a local sacred landscape, one or more sacred places and their myth(s) of origin can be called *sthalamāhātmya* (glorification of a place).<sup>9</sup> However, the *sthalamāhātmyas* about

7 The findings on site during my visit in January 2020 were supplied with information on these shrines from secondary literature (Seshadri 2003, 98, 144) and blogs about temples in Kanchi (Chamundihari 2014. "Aadhav's Temple Visits Kaancheepuram." Sadhananda Swamigal. Created February 19, 2014. Accessed June 20, 2021. <https://sadhanandaswamigal.blogspot.com/2014/02/siva-temple-in-around-kancheepuram.html>.; Kanishk, Aadav. 2017. "Sarva Teertham – Kanchipuram." *Temples of Kanchipuram* (blog). June 7, 2017. Accessed June 20, 2021. <http://templesofkanchidist.blogspot.com/2017/07/sarva-theertham-dwadhasa-lingams.html>; Sre Kagabujandar Nadi Astrological Research Centre. n.d. "Kanchipuram Temples." Sre Kagabujandar Nadi Astrological Research Centre, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu. Accessed June 20, 2021. [http://www.nadiastrologer.org/english\\_Kanchipuram\\_Temples.html](http://www.nadiastrologer.org/english_Kanchipuram_Temples.html)). As for the names, Gaṅgādhareśvara is also known as Gaṅgāvareśvara or Varuṇeśvara, Rāmanātheśvara is also known as Rāmeśvara (or sometimes identified with Siteśvara), Viśvanātheśvara is also known as Kāśī Viśvanātha, Kāmeśvara is also known as Manmatheśvara, and Dhavaḷeśvara is also known as Lakulīśvara. Thanks go to Jonas Buchholz for making me aware of the variant name of Dhavaḷeśvara and Kāmeśvara from Tamil descriptions (Shaivam.org n.d. „Lakulīcam (Tavaḷesvaram).” shaivam.org. Accessed June 20, 2021. <https://shaivam.org/hindu-hub/temples/place/503/lakulicam-thavalesvarar>; Dinamalar. n.d. „Kancipuram Civam Koyil.” (page 40). *Dinamalar* (blog). Accessed June 20, 2021. <https://temple.dinamalar.com/ListingMore.php?c=3&D=52&Page=40>).

8 Hiranyaśvara (chapter 21), Kāmeśvara, Tīrtheśvara, Viśvanātheśvara (all chapter 29), Lakulīśvara (chapter 28), and Gaṅgāvareśvara (chapter 29).

9 In general, *māhātmyas* can describe and praise deities (e.g., *Devīmāhātmya*) or various religious practices like vows (e.g., *Ekādaśīmāhātmya*). Linda Wiig (1981, 15–18) supposes that ninety-five percent of the *māhātmya* texts she reviewed have a local reference in that they either deal with a sacred place of some kind (city, *tīrtha*, region), a deity, or its representation being present at a certain place.

Kanchi I am dealing with simply use the designation *māhātmya* to denote themselves<sup>10</sup> and for the sake of readability I adopt this usage.

The *māhātmyas* about places praise the effectiveness of the place(s), one or more resident deities, or the local *tīrthas*. Additionally, they may explain the rituals that have to be performed in order to benefit from the particular powers ascribed to these sites. *Māhātmyas* reflect local and regional traditions and consider each site they describe as outstanding and most beneficial. This glorifying approach is a characteristic feature of this genre.

The authors of those texts are usually not historical persons. Instead, the texts are attributed to divine figures and do not mention the place or time in which they were written. As Peter Bisschop states, this anonymity is a factor in the authority of the *māhātmya* literature. The works are said to originate from an assumed divine telling and thus make a timeless truth claim (2011, 3). It can be, however, assumed that it was human authors who wrote these texts with an intention directly referring to their historical context of time and place (Bisschop 2011, 3f.). In the case of the texts written in Sanskrit, it were presumably members of the brahmin class, such as scholars or priests, who composed these *māhātmyas*. The richness in detail found in several passages from these texts suggests a precise knowledge of the respective geographical area on the part of the authors.

The *māhātmyas* on Kanchi express particular views on the the city and its sacred places, they praise local sites, deities, and certain ritual practices. The descriptions often include characters and narrative motifs known from the pan-Indian Purāṇic mythology. Common subjects are thereby localised at the very place the *māhātmya* describes and mythological occurrences are said to have happened right there.<sup>11</sup> The localisations are often expounded in a specific type of passage that is called *phalaśruti*. These passages explain why it is essential to go exactly to the site the text just describes and nowhere else. They tell of the benefit (*phala*, “fruit”) of visiting that place. Sometimes a *phalaśruti* states that simply being present in Kanchi effects the desired benefit. More often, however, the worship of a certain deity or a bath in a *tīrtha* is prescribed. In this way, the *māhātmyas* place Kanchi in a superior position to all other places and simultaneously relate to the practice of pilgrimage.

10 E.g., Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* 4.19ab (*proktaṃ vistarataḥ kāñcyā māhātmyaṃ varṇayāmi vaḥ* |) or the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* 32.21ab (*sarvam etan mayā proktaṃ kāñcīmāhātmyam adbhutam*).

11 For example, Rāma is said to have created a *tīrtha* called *gṛdhra* (vulture-) to give water to the vulture Jaṭāyu, who had been hurt deadly in the fight with Rāvaṇa. This is also the site of Jaṭāyu’s subsequent salvation (*mokṣa*) (Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* 8.40–45). These characters and the general story are well known from the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* (cf. *Rāmāyaṇā, Araṇyakāṇḍa, sarga* 63–64). In the *māhātmya* here, this event is made happen in Kanchi’s area and localised at the specific *tīrtha* called Gṛdhra. This sacred water body is located at the Vijayarāghava Perumāḷ temple in Thiruppukuzhi (Kanchipuram district) and is known as Jāṭāyutīrtha.



The place Sarvatīrtha is dealt with in three Sanskrit *māhātmya* texts on Kanchi.<sup>12</sup> Each of these texts presents its very own and distinctive design of Kanchi's sacred geography based on its sectarian orientation and overall structure. Existing side by side, the *māhātmyas* differ in the choice of sacred places they describe and in the means by which they spatially contextualise them in Kanchi. Additionally, the narrational style and inclusion of certain narrational elements, such as statements on the ascribed rewards of a site, vary considerably. How these characteristics come into play in the stories about Sarvatīrtha from the *māhātmyas* and to what end will be studied below. Before, I will shortly introduce the texts that contain descriptions of this water body.

(a) The first text bears the title *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(V); (V) = Vaiṣṇava), consists of thirty-two chapters and attributes itself to the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*.<sup>13</sup> The largest part of the text is taken up by the core narrative telling of the god Brahmā, who performs an *aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice) in Kanchi to see Viṣṇu (KM(V) chapters 9–17). This is the mythology of Viṣṇu's manifestation as Varadarāja, who is represented in the temple of the same name. The KM(V) further devotes a few chapters to the description of *tīrthas* situated within Kanchi and the wider area around it (KM(V) chapters 5–8) and to shorter narrative cycles on the origin of further representations of Viṣṇu.<sup>14</sup> Connected to one of the Vaiṣṇava narratives are the myths of Śiva Ekāmrānātha and the goddess Kāmākṣī, which are told intertwined with each other (KM(V) chapters 23–25). In these myths, forms of Viṣṇu are attributed greater importance than the other two *māhātmyas* on Kanchi display in their renditions of Ekāmrānātha's and Kāmākṣī's mythologies. In general, the Vaiṣṇava focus of this text is apparent throughout: not only is Viṣṇu attributed a superordinate role but also the large majority of sites are either abodes of Viṣṇu or *tīrthas* linked to one of Viṣṇu's manifestations by their narratives.

(b) The second text, also called *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(Ś); (Ś) = Śaiva), is written from a Śaiva perspective and, according to its own statement, belongs to a part of the *Skandapurāṇa*.<sup>15</sup> The text names and describes over one hundred of Śiva's sacred places all over Kanchi and in the extended surroundings and tells the related narratives in various lengths. As found in the KM(V), deities, sages, and other mythological characters well-known from the Purāṇic mythology serve as protagonists, i.e., Śiva's worshippers, in the narratives. A larger portion of the chapters (KM(Ś) chapters 39–45) is dedicated to the myth of Ekāmrānātha, Śiva's manifestation housed in the largest Śaiva temple in Kanchi. It tells of Śiva's wife Pārvatī who builds and worships a *liṅga* of sand in Kanchi to attain her husband's presence

12 See Buchholz in this volume for a comprehensive survey of the Sanskrit *māhātmyas* on Kanchi.

13 Edition from 1906 by P.B. Anantācārya, Devanāgarī script.

14 For a study on the underlying general structure, see Porcher 1985.

15 Editions from 1899 and from 1967, both in Telugu script.

there.<sup>16</sup> In the course of the KM(Ś), Vaiṣṇava places (including Varadarāja) and their myths of origin are described, albeit rather briefly and with reference to how Viṣṇu worships Śiva to achieve a desired aim. The goddess Kāmākṣī and her mythology are also featured in the text, in parts independently and partly embedded in the Ekāmranātha myth (Kāmākṣī as manifestation of Pārvaṭī). Overall, the understanding of Śiva as superior prevails and gives the text a clear Śaiva orientation.

(c) The third *māhātmya* dealt with here is a text titled *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (KV). It consists of fourteen chapters and attributes itself to the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāna*.<sup>17</sup> Just over a third of the chapters (KV chapters 1, 11–14) deal with the mythology of Kāmākṣī, the famous representation of the Goddess in Kanchi. These clearly show a Śākta orientation and display a (local) divine hierarchy in which Kāmākṣī is placed at the top. Her origin myth tells the story of the great Goddess (Devī) staying in Kanchi in her universal form as Mahātripurasundarī. It employs a common narrative motif of Goddess' mythology by relating how Devī kills a certain demon to rescue the world.<sup>18</sup> The mythology evolves in an area (*kṣetra*) in the centre of Kanchi (where the Kāmākṣī temple is), which is specifically assigned to Kāmākṣī and characterised in a separate chapter (KV chapter 10) by listing various sacred places located in this area. These sites consist of *śivaliṅgas*, Viṣṇu's abodes, Goddesses, and *tīrthas* in almost equal number, thereby showing no clear emphasis in one way or the other.

In a similar manner, the KV describes a *kṣetra* of Varadarāja in the south-east of Kanchi (where his temple is) and a rendering of his mythology (KV chapters 2–5) and an area of Ekāmranātha in the north-west (around his temple) and his story of origin (KV chapters 6–9). These narratives present Viṣṇu and Śiva in the pre-eminent position. This contrasting approach to the obvious Śākta orientation of the Kāmākṣī chapters is resolved by stating that Viṣṇu (Varadarāja) and Śiva (Ekāmranātha) are but manifestations of the Goddess (KV chapter 1), thus establishing the underlaying understanding of Devī on top of the divine hierarchy.<sup>19</sup>

As already apparent from this overview, the three *māhātmya* texts refer to a common mythological corpus. In spite of their varying sectarian affiliations, the texts still cover the same core narratives, yet attributing different importance to them and to individual elements. These myths are all set in the same sacred space of Kanchi, wherefore the *māhātmyas* provide insight into the religious traditions' various understandings of the very same place(s). Moreover, they adapt universal and transre-

16 This narrative is explored in detail by Kerstin Schier (2018) in her study of the annual temple festival at the Ekāmranātha temple.

17 Editions from 1889 in Telugu script and from 1968 in Devanāgarī.

18 The motif of the Goddess slaying a demon who pains the world is frequently incorporated in Goddess's mythology. Its most comprehensive narrative is the *Devīmāhātmya* of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāna*. On specifically the version of this narrative from the KV, see Ilkama 2018, 62–70.

19 Among other aspects, this leads Anne Moßner in her study of the KV to regard the complete text as written from a Śākta perspective (2008, 7f.).

gional narrative motifs known from the *Purāṇas* to local spatial settings and include familiar characters in local renderings of mythological stories.

## Sarvatīrtha in Kanchi's Mythologies

I will now explore the aspects of differing interpretations of the same place, the means used to contextualise a sacred place within a larger sacred geography and the relations of local mythological narratives to pan-Indian Purāṇic motifs and characters in more detail based on the example of Sarvatīrtha. This study is based on relevant text passages from the three *māhātmyas* which relate the story (of origin) and characteristics of Sarvatīrtha.

(a) The (Vaiṣṇava) *Kāñcīmāhātmya* mentions Sarvatīrtha and its mythology at two places. The first passage constitutes one episode in a description of several *tīrthas* located within Kanchi (KM(V) chapter 5). It summarises the myth of origin of Sarvatīrtha with barely hinting at the contextualising narrative in which it is embedded.

[Sage Nārada talks to king Ambarīṣa:] “Another [*tīrtha*] again, lord of kings, is the most significant and best among the *tīrthas*. It is called Sarvatīrtha and removes all evil (*pāpa*). Once gods, Gandharvas, Siddhas, highest seers and *tīrthas* in the world, that are lakes, rivers and likewise (male) rivers, all gathered. Where they stood and praised Keśava (Viṣṇu) to make Gaṅgā pure again after she had become inauspicious because of Gaurī's (Pārvatī) curse, there is the best among *tīrthas*. It is meritorious and endowed with all *tīrthas*” (KM(V) 5.46–49b).<sup>20</sup>

From this condensed version we learn that the *tīrtha* was created where various heavenly beings and bodies of water unitedly pled with Viṣṇu for the cursed Gaṅgā to become pure again. The context of the mythological event does not become clear but an orientation towards Viṣṇu is indicated by the gods seeking help from Viṣṇu, who is thus given a position of power. Also missing is an information on the location of the *tīrtha* in Kanchi. Only several verses before in the same chapter, in episodes on other water bodies, are spatial references given. These state that a *tīrtha* called Indratīrtha lies in the north-west of Hastiśaila (KM(V) 5.19cd) and that there are several more situated in the same direction (KM(V) 5.27c–29b). This localisation hence pertains to Sarvatīrtha as well. Hastiśaila, (“elephant hill”<sup>21</sup>), on whose top Varadarāja resides, lies rather far away across the city from Sarvatīrtha (see figure 2) but is a central site in the KM(V) due to its connection to Varadarāja indicating the overall spatial orientation of the text.

20 All translations are my own. The respective Sanskrit passages are given in the Appendix.

21 This is the specific name of the building at whose first floor the sanctum sanctorum of the Varadarāja temple is situated. On different derivations of this name, see Raman (1975, 6) and Srinivasan (1979, 7).

Both the specific spatial link and the larger mythological narrative involving the origin of Sarvatīrtha are later elaborated in the KM(V) chapters 26 to 27. To allow an understanding of the episode on Sarvatīrtha within the multi-layered storyline, I will first summarise here the larger narrative that is the rendition of Ekāmranātha's myth in the KM(V) (KM(V) chapters 23–25): Pārvaṭī is cursed by Śiva to have black skin and ugly eyes. She performs penance at Kanchi and Viṣṇu as Vāmana relieves her from the curse. Divinely beautiful again, she receives the name Kāmākṣī and stays in Kanchi. Pārvaṭī then wishes to be near Śiva, and Vāmana instructs her to build a sand *līṅga*. While Pārvaṭī worships the *līṅga* continuously, Śiva sends various disturbances to test her devotion. The last one is Gaṅgā, whose waters Śiva releases from his hair. Pārvaṭī is furious about this disturbance and embraces the sand *līṅga* for protection. She also curses Gaṅgā to become ugly and inauspicious (and therefore unfit for ritual bathing, for which the Gaṅgā is particularly famed). Śiva then eventually manifests in Kanchi to be with Pārvaṭī there.<sup>22</sup> Only after this narrative has come to an end (ends in KM(V) chapter 25), is the storyline centring around Gaṅgā taken up again (KM(V) chapters 26–27). This extension from the Ekāmranātha myth is only found in the Vaiṣṇava text and not in the other two *māhātmyas*. Taking up the widely known idea of the Gaṅgā as epitome of a purifying river, it details Gaṅgā's quest for liberation from the curse, which causes the gods together with all *tīrthas* to travel the worlds in search of Viṣṇu. They praise him and ask him to make Gaṅgā pure again. Eventually, Viṣṇu appears in front of the gods and Gaṅgā in Kanchi, and the gods and *tīrthas* praise him there. They all see him as Varadarāja and mounted on the bird Garuḍa as his vehicle. Viṣṇu then fulfils the gods' and Gaṅgā's plea for the latter's redemption and renewed auspiciousness. He creates *tīrthas* at the places in Kanchi where the gods (Sarvatīrtha) and Gaṅgā (Maṅgala-tīrtha) stood to praise him. The passage about the origin of Sarvatīrtha reads as follows:

[Varadarāja speaks to Gaṅgā:] “ ‘Also where the gods all stood together unified to free you from this inauspicious curse and delighted me, there a huge, meritorious and purifying lake shall come into being. They shall all live in this lake on my command. As all gods indeed continually live in this *tīrtha*, this purifying lake shall be called Sarvatīrtha.’ ”

22 On the different version of Ekāmranātha's myth in the three Sanskrit *māhātmyas* on Kanchi and other Sanskrit and Tamil sources, see Schier 2018, 73–96. The element of Pārvaṭī cursing Gaṅgā is only found in the Vaiṣṇava text, to which Kerstin Schier (2018, 90) writes: “Of particular interest is the episode in which Pārvaṭī curses the river Gaṅgā, making it an outcast. By extension, everybody who comes into contact with the river also becomes an outcast. Usually, Gaṅgā is regarded as the salvific river par excellence. The curse of Gaṅgā occurs only in this version of the myth. I can offer no explanation for this singular variation, except the underlying jealousy of Pārvaṭī and Gaṅgā, which is known from pan-Indian myth, and serves as a theme in the oral tradition of the Ekāmranātha temple festival [...]”.

The man who bathes in there with devotion, performs the act of tonsure and *pārvaṇaśrāddha* (ancestor ritual (*śrāddha*) at the conjunction of sun and moon (*pārvaṇa*)) shall be known as one who has performed an *aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice).” (KM(V) 27.22–25)

The Gaṅgā narrative then culminates in the explanation of Garuḍasevā, Varadarāja's procession mounted on the man-eagle Garuḍa as his vehicle (*vāhana*). Varadarāja instructs Brahmā to take him on Garuḍa up to Maṅgalatīrtha (where Gaṅgā praised Viṣṇu) for Gaṅgā to see him there each year during *brahmotsava* (annual festival). Gaṅgā will be annually present at Maṅgalatīrtha, too, and will thus become purified from the sins that people have emitted in her waters when taking a ritual bath. In this way, the Gaṅgā narrative, evolving from a Śaiva mythology, serves as transition to a Viṣṇu-oriented one, explaining why Varadarāja takes to the western part of Kanchi during *brahmotsava*, the largest annual temple festival at the Varadarāja temple. Interestingly, the Garuḍasevā procession these days does not pass by Sarvatīrtha (only Maṅgalatīrtha, where Gaṅgā stood; see figure 3), but the procession with Varadarāja as Mohinī on another day during the festival<sup>23</sup> (Hüsken 2013, 111, fig. 4). The inclusion of Garuḍasevā in the narrative further highlights the link between Sarvatīrtha and Varadarāja at the other end of the city, which reflects the localisation of the *tīrtha* analysed in the context of the first passage given above.

The necessity to introduce the rather lengthy narrative in order to fully understand the inclusion of the passage on Sarvatīrtha shows that the focus of the KM(V) is on mythological narratives: mythology sets the course of the narrative and only after the story has evolved sufficiently, events from the narrative are localised at specific places. This procedure is characteristic for most of the KM(V) and is exemplarily shown by the second passage on Sarvatīrtha. Here, too, the narrative is the starting point and only later the connection of a mythological event (the gods praise Viṣṇu) to a specific place (Sarvatīrtha) is established.

As far as the myth of Sarvatīrtha is concerned, the two passages from the KM(V) agree with each other. The second one is taken out of a larger narrative and needs context to make sense. It only indicates the creation of the *tīrtha* as such. Conversely, the first episode is self-contained but needs contextualising as the summary is very condensed. The naming of Sarvatīrtha, however, corresponds in both episodes, with the first passage being more general. It mentions that Sarvatīrtha is endowed (*samanvita*) with all [who had gathered to praise Viṣṇu there] while the second section derives the name more explicitly, as the word *sarva* in the place's name is understood as stemming from *all* the gods actually residing at this *tīrtha* on Viṣṇu's command. Additionally, the efficacy of Sarvatīrtha in the context of ancestor rituals (*śrāddha*) is highlighted in the same passage. This goes beyond the general

23 Garuḍasevā takes place in the morning of the third day, the procession with Viṣṇu as Mohinī in the morning of the fifth day of *brahmotsava* (Hüsken 2013, 102, fn. 9). On the festival, see Hüsken 2013, 101ff.



attributions of it being the best place of all and destroying all sins mentioned in the summarising first episode.

Overall, the place Sarvatīrtha as such occupies a secondary role in the context of the larger multi-layered narrative that originally starts out from the myth of Ekāmrānātha. Instead, emphasis is given to the mythological events leading to the creation of the *tīrtha*. In this, the description of Sarvatīrtha is exemplary for how many of the myths of sacred places are dealt with in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. Likewise, the spatial orientation with reference to Hastiśaila and Varadarāja underlines their central position in the text's design of Kanchi's sacred geography.

(b) The Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* has a distinctly different approach to both the place Sarvatīrtha and its mythology. In chapter 29 of the text we find the story on the origin of the *tīrtha* and in chapter 45 the place is mentioned again in the context of Ekāmrānātha's mythology. The first passage on Sarvatīrtha is embedded in descriptions of *śivaliṅgas* situated on its shores. One of them is Tīrtheśvara (see figure 5), and to fully understand the context, it is necessary to first summarise the passage on this *liṅga*. This story immediately precedes the verses on Sarvatīrtha and is linked to them in terms of content. In the story of Tīrtheśvara, all the *tīrthas* come to Kanchi for purification. They all install a *liṅga* with their name (*tīrtha-*) there to worship Śiva. Pleased by the *tīrthas'* devotion, Śiva stays at the *tīrtha's* shores (they all form one water body) as Tīrtheśvara (Tīrtheśa in the text) and grants them a boon. Then the part on Sarvatīrtha begins, which reads as follows:

[Śiva speaks to the *tīrthas*:] “ ‘From now onwards, people who bath in you all, satiate gods, sages, and ancestors, then give wealth to a Yogī, and see me as Tīrtheśvara, will attain the highest liberation. If a man shaves, takes a bath in the water of Sarvatīrtha and particularly performs the act of *śrāddha* (ceremony for the dead ancestors), gives some *dakṣiṇā* (donation for a priest) to brahmins, too, and honours me—or if he once offers obeisance to [me]—who [I] stay at the *tīrtha*, then his ancestors will be satisfied and reach me.’ [...]”

[The narrator Kauśika continues:] The murder of a brahmin, of a hero, of an embryo, and of the father perish in the moment [of bathing], and so do the murder of the mother, and of a cow. By bathing in this Sarvatīrtha and by seeing Tīrtheśa, the sins of man and others are destroyed. [...]

Just by bathing here, Prahlāda was freed from the fault of patricide and Vibhīṣaṇa from the great fault of murdering his brother. Likewise, Paraśurāma [was freed] just by bathing in the beautiful Sarvatīrtha in front of Tīrtheśa for the liberation from [the fault] a murder of a hero, too, and Rāma, the enemy of Rāvaṇa, who had come with this brother. After he had killed the teachers headed by Droṇa and Kṛpa, Arjuna similarly became one whose sin was gone after bathing in Sarvatīrtha, the best of all [*tīrthas*]. He became a knower of the essence of Śiva and attained to unlimited fame. For the liberation from embryo-murder, Aśvatthāman bathed [in it], too. [...]” (KM(Ś) 29.14c–30b).

With regard to the aspect of spatial references, this section from the KM(Ś) establishes a link between Sarvatīrtha and Tīrtheśvara, who is situated at the tank's shores. The connection is grounded in a unifying narrative and stressed by statements on the ascribed power of Sarvatīrtha. This is said to come to fruition through the combination of taking a bath in its waters and visual perception (*darśana*) of Tīrtheśvara. A geographical closeness is thus emphasised by a prescription of ritual acts. At the same time, the worship of Śiva (here in his particular representation as Tīrtheśvara) is integrated into the rituals involving Sarvatīrtha. In my view, this order reflects a mode of worship directed towards the deity (here Śiva) and attributes a supplementary role to a bath in the *tīrtha* and consequently to the site itself. Therefore the *tīrtha* is not considered a standalone place but is instead thought of in connection to a *śivaliṅga*.

Besides the underlying arrangement that groups Sarvatīrtha with Tīrtheśvara, the *phalaśruti* stories of this text passage are its most prominent characteristic. Among the rewards to be given by Sarvatīrtha, its power to redeem the fault of murder is particularly highlighted. This ascription is underlined through examples of various figures known from the pan-Indian mythology, such as Prahlāda, Paraśurāma, Rāma and Arjuna. They are said to have been freed from the sin of murder after they took a (ritual) bath in Sarvatīrtha. These examples refer to mythological events described in Purāṇic and epic narratives (e.g., Rāma defeating Rāvaṇa in the *Rāmāyaṇa*) and link them to Sarvatīrtha in Kanchi. In this way, interpretations of particular story lines from well-known narratives are created to incorporate the local site, attempting to place it in a broader context and highlight its efficacy.

In comparison with the narrative about Sarvatīrtha presented in the KM(V), a correspondence can be noted. Here as there, a sacred place is created where the gods as/and *tīrthas* had gathered to worship the deity whom the respective text considers the highest. However, this motif from the combined story of Tīrtheśvara and Sarvatīrtha in the KM(Ś) is contextualised in the Vaiṣṇava text in a narrative about Gaṅgā, which evolves from an event in Ekāmranātha's myth but basically aims at the explanation of Varadarāja's procession (see above). As we will see, both the KM(Ś) and the KV continue the Śaiva narrative differently. Therefore I wonder why particularly this element has found its way into the KM(V) in a distinctly different context.

The second passage from the KM(Ś) is directly woven into the narrative of Ekāmranātha's myth of origin (KM(Ś) chapters 39–45). Instructed by Śiva, Pārvaṭī builds and worships a *liṅga* of sand in Kanchi to attain her husband's presence there. To test her devotion, Śiva causes a great destructive flood to arise from the nearby Kampā river.<sup>24</sup> Pārvaṭī embraces the sand *liṅga* to protect it from the flood and her female companion Bhadrakālī helps her tame the waters. Śiva then appears, pleased

24 The idea of a destructive flood is found in Tamil tradition from early literature onwards (Shulman 1980, 55ff.).

with Pārvaṭī's steadfast dedication, and gives instructions on what to do with the waters collected in Bhadrakālī's skull-bowl. This episode involves Sarvatīrtha and reads as follows:

[Kauśika narrates:] “The moon-crowned one (Śiva) called Bhadrakālī and said: ‘Well, Bhadrā, your entire behaviour is dear to Devī (Pārvaṭī). Quickly release all the water from your skull-like vessel that is in your hand. As you made the water slow down that resembles water of a destructive flood (*praḷaya*), you are named Praḷayamandā (the one who slows down *praḷaya*). Called [by this name] you stand in front of me.’

Then all the water was released from the skull-bowl by the one thus spoken to (Bhadrakālī) and the one who was served by [the gods] beginning with Hari (Viṣṇu) and Brahmā (= Śiva) arrested this water with his light in his western direction to [the *tīrtha*] called Sarvatīrtha.

This Sarvatīrtha in Kāñcī destroys the sin of assaulting a brahmin etc. By remembering it, old age and death are removed for men.” (KM(Ś) 45.109–113)

From this section we learn that the caught-up water from the overflowing Kampā river was released into Sarvatīrtha. I argue, that this is not the *tīrtha*'s myth of origin but an integration of an already existing place into the extended mythology of Ekāmranātha. In the context of the latter, the site Sarvatīrtha only makes an appearance in passing to tell what happens to the waters of the flood sent by Śiva and thus wraps up this narrative strand. The myth of origin of Sarvatīrtha forms the narrative in KM(Ś) chapter 29 that is detailed above. Overall, this means that, unlike in the KM(V) (and in the KV, see below), there is no separate narrative about Sarvatīrtha that evolves from the main mythology on Ekāmranātha. Nevertheless, the *tīrtha*, which is situated at a short distance (see figure 1), is spatially linked to the site of Ekāmranātha through the story told in the second text passage. A reflection of this notion is found in the present role of Sarvatīrtha during the annual temple festival of the Ekāmranātha temple, when the concluding ritual bath is carried out there.

(c) The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* takes another approach on Sarvatīrtha by dedicating an entire chapter (KV chapter 9) to its mythology. Following the KV's version of Ekāmranātha's myth (KV chapter 8), it refers back to an event occurring in the latter narrative, similarly to the KM(V) and the second episode from the KM(Ś). Likewise, the narrative in the KV about Ekāmranātha closely resembles the renderings found in the other two *māhātmyas* and includes several of the same aspects. Since this myth contextualises the chapter on Sarvatīrtha, I will introduce the basic story line relevant for the origin of the *tīrtha*: to atone for covering his eyes, Śiva instructs Pārvaṭī to venerate him in Kanchī. Accordingly, Pārvaṭī builds a *liṅga* out of sand and worships it. Śiva sends Kampā (local name of the Gaṅgā) twice in form of a destructive flood (*praḷaya*) to disturb Pārvaṭī's efforts. The first time the waters are contained in a skull-bowl by one of Pārvaṭī's female companions, subsequently called Praḷaya-bandhinī (the one who tames *praḷaya*). When the waters of the Kampā roll in for the

second time, Pārvatī embraces the *liṅga* to protect it. Pleased, Śiva agrees to stay in Kanchi as Ekāmranātha.

The chapter about Sarvatīrtha then starts with the location of the site and a description of the course of the Kampā river, which flows along bodies of water and absorbs them on its way to Kanchi (KV 9.3–10b). Then the scene changes to after the waters of the Kampā are contained in Praḷayabandhinī's skull-bowl (as told in Ekāmranātha's myth). On this basis, the story continues to introduce the origin of the *tīrtha* and at the same time closes the narrative strand about the water of the Kampā that was previously held up in the vessel.

[The sage Mārkaṇḍeya narrates to king Suratha:] “To affirm [his] love for Śivā (Pārvatī) and in order to remove her fear, Śaṅkara (Śiva) hid Gaṅgā, who originates in the masses of his twisted hairlocks, when she was on earth as the destructive [flood] (*praḷayarūpinī*), in the ground by putting his foot down on the earth (creating a hole). [...] The skull-like vessel Praḷayabandhinī laid down to hinder *praḷaya* when the Kampā came for destruction [of the sand *liṅga*], and which holds together the water of the Kampā as long as the water was inside the vessel, that skull-like vessel is there [at the hole], releasing the water of this destructive [flood].

Then Gaurī as eight-year-old heard of the glories of this *tīrtha* and wished for the beauty of fresh youth. According to the rules said by Śaṅkara in his words of grace, Pārvatī then had Devaśilpin (Viśvakarman, the divine constructor) make steps, proper walls, etc. for this *tīrtha*. Mahāgaurī (Pārvatī) then established the divine name Sarvatīrtha to be known for this *tīrtha*, because it is forever a combined *tīrtha* of thirty-five million *tīrthas* together with the flowing Kampā, king. After she took a bath in this *tīrtha*, Gaurī, full of fresh youth and endowed with beauty, attained splendour and auspiciousness. She became visible in refined golden [form] as Kāmākṣī, who grants wishes (*kāma*) [...]” (KV 9.12–21b)

Contextualised in terms of characters and narrative from Ekāmranātha's mythology, this episode offers a rather detailed story about the origin and evolution of Sarvatīrtha. Up to the point where the water released from the vessel of Pārvatī's companion Praḷayabandhinī flows into Sarvatīrtha, the narrative shows a great similarity with parts of the KM(Ś). Whereas I interpret the Śaiva text to understand the water from the skull-bowl as water supply for an already existing *tīrtha*, I consider the same narrative motif to form the story of origin of Sarvatīrtha in the KV. The reason is that the KV presents a self-contained story and mentions why (to console Pārvatī) and how (creating an indentation) Śiva first creates the place where the water from the vessel can be collected.

The story then continues with Pārvatī, who has the physical architecture of the tank built, which makes the KV the only text to mention details about the material appearance. While still set in a mythological framework, this element refers to a physically tangible construction of Sarvatīrtha resembling a temple tank as we might picture it and as can be still seen today on site. The description is too general to ascertain a familiarity with the place on part of the composers of the KV. More likely

it is a reflection of the understanding of how the outer form of a *tīrtha* is imagined to look like. However, the most notable characteristic is that architectural features *are* described. These are only addressed in exceptional cases in the text (just as in the KM(V) and KM(Ś)), as the focus lies on the sacredness of the places itself. The significance of any sacred place is thus understood to be independent of possibly changing buildings at the site and consequently assigned a continuous claim to sacredness.

Subsequent to the first text passage from the KV given above, the narrative about Pārvaṭī is brought to a close. It now turns to the efficacy of Sarvatīrtha. As the main character, Pārvaṭī is the one to profit from the beneficial character of Sarvatīrtha (see episode above) and afterwards awards Sarvatīrtha certain powers.

[The sage Mārkaṇḍeya narrates to king Suratha:] “Mahāgaurī then worshipped the *tīrtha* and gave it a boon. ‘By seeing Sarvatīrtha, people will receive the reward of visiting and bathing in all *tīrthas* and they attain Śiva, too,’ is the boon Gaurī granted [...]. From that time onwards the pleasant Sarvatīrtha is there. King, the reward one may receive by bathing in all the *tīrthas* situated in Kāñcī at the prescribed time, all these rewards one obtains by [taking] a bath once in Sarvatīrtha. Once many [people] desiring *mokṣa* (liberation) took a bath in Sarvatīrtha, were freed from evil, and went to Śiva’s world.” (KV 9.32–37)

Besides the more general ascriptions of rewarding qualities, this episode specifically refers to the name of the *tīrtha* in that only the sight of Sarvatīrtha will give the same benefits of visiting and bathing in all (*sarva*) *tīrthas*. It even establishes a local reference by stating that just one bath in Sarvatīrtha is equal in rewards to taking a bath in all *tīrthas* in Kanchi. The name Sarvatīrtha itself is also derived from the idea that the place incorporates all bodies of water (*sarvatīrtham iti khyātaṃ sarvatīrtha-samanvayāt*, KV 9.4cd), more specifically the river Kampā and a huge amount of *tīrthas* as given in the first passage from the KV. The beginning of the chapter (KV 9.3–10b) details the course of Kampā along various bodies of water up to Kanchi, illustrating the notion that it consists of *tīrthas*.

The ascribed efficacy of Sarvatīrtha is taken up again in an illustrative *phalaśruti* story highlighting the efficacy of the place. In agreement with both the KM(V) and the KM(Ś), it particularly emphasises the powers of Sarvatīrtha with reference to *śrāddha* (KV 9.38–45).<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the KV is very clear in locating Sarvatīrtha. Due to the text’s strict adherence to locating the sacred places it describes, it states that the *tīrtha* is eight *aṃśas* (parts) south-west of Ekāmrānātha in Rudraśālā (KV 9.3- 4b), reflecting the spatial relationship on site (see figure 1). Rudraśālā is the area in Kanchi’s west

25 A twice-born living at the bank of the Tāmrāpārṇī (Thamirabarani river, Tirunelveli and Thothukudi districts, Tamil Nadu) fathers a son with a married woman. This fault causes his ancestors to reach hell and his ancestor rituals to go wrong. Only after he travels to Kanchi and performs the rituals at Sarvatīrtha can his ancestors reach heaven. He himself lives till the end of his life and then attains Śiva’s world.



assigned to Śiva as Ekāmranātha. The location of Sarvatīrtha thus justifies the connection to Śiva, which is reflected by the narrative evolving from Ekāmranātha's mythology (KV chapter 8) and the notion of Śiva's world as epitome of liberation as mentioned in the *phalaśruti* passages. I see this as an example of pronounced reciprocal assignments between the narratives in the KV featuring Viṣṇu, Śiva or Devī as the highest deity and the areas assigned to their local manifestations in Kanchi, where sacred places and the deities' mythologies are set (see section on the *māhātmyas* above).

As far as the myth of origin and a section on the attributed efficacy are concerned, the KV includes the longest and most balanced description of Sarvatīrtha of all three *māhātmyas*. Both the narrative and the mode of locating the place establish a connection to Ekāmranātha and firmly situate the place in his sphere of influence. Within the KV, Sarvatīrtha is one of three bodies of water that are dealt with at length in a separate chapter. One *tīrtha* each lies in one of the three areas assigned to Varadarāja (south-east of Kanchi), Kāmākṣī (centre), and Ekāmranātha (west) and is accordingly contextualised spatially and narratively. As the *tīrtha* located in Ekāmranātha's space, the significance of Sarvatīrtha is thus highlighted and the site attributed a more prominent position than the temple tanks in the compound of the Ekāmranātha temple itself.

## Conclusion

This study has explored the mythological narratives of the sacred place Sarvatīrtha in Kanchi from three Sanskrit *māhātmyas* both text-immanently and cross-textually. A particular focus was laid on the interpretation of the site within the texts' understanding of the city's sacred landscape.

In all three texts, the respective passages on Sarvatīrtha are exemplary for the general structure of the respective text and its notion of *tīrthas*. The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* first introduces the place in the part of the text entirely devoted to bodies of water (KM(V) chapters 5–8) and spatially situates it with reference to Varadarāja's abode on the other side of the city. This particular alignment and a general Vaiṣṇava orientation are then found later in the text when the story of the origin of Sarvatīrtha is integrated into a larger narrative. This superordinate narrative about Gaṅgā has its starting point in the KM(V)'s version of Ekāmranātha's mythology. However, it quickly transforms into a Viṣṇu-oriented narrative, aiming at the explanation of Varadarāja's procession mounted on Garuḍa during the annual *brahmotsava* festival. In everything, the focus lies on the narrative rather the place itself. It thus becomes clear that the exposition of Viṣṇu's superiority takes precedence over the site as *tīrtha*, which serves to locate an event that has happened before in the narrative and to establish a reference to the locality.

The KM(Ś) also presents an obvious contextualisation. The story about the origin of Sarvatīrtha relies upon the geographical closeness to the *liṅga* Tīrtheśvara, which

is situated at the shores of the tank and is introduced immediately before. The text continuously uses references to a nearby site to map the sacred places in the city following a schema that geographically moves from the south-west to the north-east in Kanchi. The established spatial connection is particularly crucial for *tīrthas*, which are understood as second-order places to *śivaliṅgas* and their efficacy to take effect only in combination with the worship of Śiva. This orientation turns the focus to Śiva and his decisive agency as also reflected in the second episode on Sarvatīrtha, which is integrated into Ekāmranātha's mythology.

A strong sense of locality and belonging to Ekāmranātha's assigned territory in Kanchi and his mythology is found in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*. The Goddess in the form of Pārvatī as Śiva's wife is the main character, but the local goddess Kāmākṣī herself is only referred to as a side note. This may surprise in a text that bears the name "Kāmākṣī" in its title, but is less so given that the text geographically and structurally separates between parts on Viṣṇu, Śiva and Devī, in which each deity's local manifestation occupies the highest position. Within the chapters oriented towards Ekāmranātha, Sarvatīrtha is structurally singled out with a complete chapter devoted to it and thus attributed the most significance among the *tīrthas*. As a sacred body of water, it is understood as independent of other sacred sites, with a particular self-contained story of origin and separate powers attributed to it. The narrative is supplemented with an additional *phalaśruti* story, as it is found in all chapters of the text except the first and the last, to illustrate the power of the focal subject (e.g., Rudraśālā, Ekāmranātha, Sarvatīrtha, etc.) of the respective chapter.

In spite of differences in the mode of narration, all three texts agree on the general sacredness of Sarvatīrtha. They particularly mention the place's extraordinary suitability for ancestor rituals. The most basic unanimous element of all the narratives, however, is an association with Śaiva mythology, and often they evolve from Ekāmranātha's myth. The Śaiva connection is very explicit in the case of the KM(Ś), which as a text itself unquestionably presents a clear Śaiva orientation. Sarvatīrtha is narratively linked to the *liṅga* Tīrtheśvara on the one hand and woven into the mythology of Ekāmranātha on the other. Similarly, a strong Śaiva orientation is found in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*. Here the myth of Sarvatīrtha evolves from Ekāmranātha's mythology and is set in his assigned territory in Kanchi due to the location of Sarvatīrtha within this area. Therefore, the notion of a divine hierarchy with Śiva at the top also permeates the narrative of the *tīrtha*. Only an implicit connection to Śaiva mythology is found in the KM(V). The narrative about Gaṅgā, which includes the story about Sarvatīrtha, narratively refers back to Ekāmranātha's mythology but straight away implements a focus on Viṣṇu as Varadarāja and his superiority.

Altogether, the close resemblances on the narrative level suggest a common pool of local mythologies from which the narratives on Sarvatīrtha in the texts are derived. This idea could already be supposed following the review of the major narrative strands of the text attempted in the beginning of this and proves true in the particular case of Sarvatīrtha. While respecting their individual narrative structure, geo-spatial

outline of Kanchi's sacred landscape, and sectarian orientation, the texts present several overlapping details besides the general association with Śiva and particularly Ekāmrānātha. In the case of the element of the assembled gods as/and water bodies giving the name to Sarvatīrtha, the KM(V) and KM(Ś) agree on the essence but apply it in widely different contexts. The Śaiva text introduces a self-contained, combined narrative of Tīrtheśvara and Sarvatīrtha. In contrast, the Vaiṣṇava text generally ignores Śaiva narratives and places, except of its rendering of the Ekāmrānātha mythology. This includes the episode in which Śiva sends the Gaṅgā/Kampā to test Pārvatī's devotion to the sand *liṅga*, but not the water that is caught in a vessel. Thus, the reference is missing for the text to continue like the KM(Ś) and KV, which follow up on the contained water of the river Kampā flowing into Sarvatīrtha. I hence interpret the narrative about Gaṅgā in the KM(V) as a means to transit to a Vaiṣṇava setting from the preceding Śaiva material, while contextualising the stories of some sites not yet mentioned but considered important in Kanchi's sacred landscape (such as Sarvatīrtha). Assuming that both narratives circulated, the separate element of the gathered gods was certainly easier to adopt to suit the overall outline of the chapter in the KM(V) than the motif of the Kampā. While I consider it difficult to evaluate if one text has borrowed from the other, I tend to suppose a transfer from the KM(Ś) to the KM(V) due to the subordinate role of Sarvatīrtha and the more complex narrative it is woven into in the latter text. It would be interesting to explore further narratives with regard to "borrowed" motifs to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the texts' co-existing narratives.

The issue of narrative adoption is clearer regarding the nearly identical stories of the KM(Ś) and the KV on Sarvatīrtha. In light of the KV's approach to detail Ekāmrānātha's (and Varadarāja's) mythology without integrating statements on the Goddess's superiority, the close congruences raise the question if and to what extent the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* in this case (and more generally, too) bases itself on the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. This aspect can likewise be extended to include a comparison with the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* to explore agreements in the context of Varadarāja's mythology. Given the summarising nature of the KV, it seems less likely that the other two *māhātmyas* have borrowed from the KV. Moreover, it would be worthwhile to examine whether the cross-textual comparative approach can help with a relative chronology of the *māhātmyas* on Kanchi and to what extent certain motifs can be identified as dominant. Likewise, material elements on site in Kanchi that refer to the narratives of a sacred place (e.g., the narrative/*phalaśruti* written on signboards or stone slabs, as sculptures in the temple/shrine) and ritual enactments need further study in the context of the relationship of the co-existing *māhātmyas* on Kanchi.

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## Appendix<sup>26</sup>

### Vaiṣṇava Kāñcīmāhātmya

punar anyac ca rājendra tīrthānām uttamam param |  
 sarvatīrtham iti khyātam sarvapāpaprāṇāśanam || KM(V) 5.46 ||  
 purā devās sagandharvāḥ siddhās ca paramarṣayaḥ |  
 tīrthāni yāni lokeṣu hradā nadyo nadās tathā || KM(V) 5.47 ||  
 sarve sametya sahitās tuṣṭuvur yatra keśavam |  
 kartum vikaluṣām gaṅgām gaurīśāpād amaṅgaḷām || KM(V) 5.48 ||  
 tatra tīrthavaram puṇyam sarvatīrthais samanvitam | KM(V) 5.49ab |

ete [']pi tvām mocāyituṃ śāpād asmād amaṅgaḷāt |  
 sahitāḥ saṅghaśo yatra sthitvā māṃ tuṣṭuvus surāḥ || KM(V) 27.22 ||  
 tatrāpi sumahat puṇyam saro bhavatu pāvanam |  
 tasmīn sarasi te sarve vasantv iha mahājñayā || KM(V) 27.23 ||  
 yasmāt sarve 'pi tīrthe 'smin nivasanty anīśam surāḥ |  
 tasmāt tat sarvatīrthākhyam saro bhavatu pāvanam || KM(V) 27.24 ||

26 The transcripts are based on the edition of the KM(V) from 1906, on the Devanāgarī editions of the KM(S) from 1967 and of the KV from 1968.



atra bhaktyā naras snātvā kṛtvā tu vapanakriyām |  
yaḥ kuryāt pārvaṇaśraddhaṃ taṃ viśvād aśvamedhinam || KM(V) 27.25 ||

### Śaiva Kāñcīmāhātmya

adya prabhṛti yuṣmāsu snātvā santarpya mānavāḥ || KM(Ś) 29.14cd ||  
devān ṛṣīn pitṛṇ paścād dattvā vittam ca yogine |  
dṛṣtvā tīrtheśvaram māṃ ca prāpnuyur muktim uttamām || KM(Ś) 29.15 ||  
yo bhaktyā vapanam kṛtvā sarvatīrthajale narah |  
snātvā pitṛṇām śraddhādikarma kuryād viśeṣataḥ || KM(Ś) 29.16 ||  
brāhmaṇebhyo ‘pi yad kiñcid vitīrya kila dakṣiṇām |  
mām apy ārādhya tīrasthaṃ sakṛd vā praṇamed yadi || KM(Ś) 29.17 ||  
tasyaiva pitaras tṛptā māṃ vrajanti na saṃśayaḥ |  
iti dattvā varam śambhuḥ pratijñām akarot punaḥ || KM(Ś) 29.18 ||  
sarvatīrthe sakṛt snānam sakṛd ekāmradarśanam |  
sambhaved yadi sarveṣāṃ samsāro na bhavet punaḥ || KM(Ś) 29.19 ||  
bhuktiś ca teṣāṃ muktiś ca puruṣārthacatuṣṭayam |  
bhūyān mama kṛpā teṣu paripūrṇāstu nityaśaḥ || KM(Ś) 29.20 ||  
brahmahatyā vīrahatyā bhrūṇahatyā ca tatkṣaṇāt |  
pitṛhatyā ca naśyet tu mātṛhatyā ca goghnatā || KM(Ś) 29.21 ||  
snānāc ca sarvatīrthe ‘smin tīrtheśasya ca darśanāt |  
narasya yasya kasyāpi naśyeyuḥ pātakāni ca || KM(Ś) 29.22 ||  
pratijñām idṛśīm kṛtvā kṣaṇād antarhitaś śivaḥ |  
tadā prabhṛti tīrthe ‘smin hatyādoṣavaśam gatāḥ || KM(Ś) 29.23 ||  
vimuktā bahavas snātvā dṛṣtvā devaṃ ca śaṅkaram |  
prahlādaḥ pitṛhatyāyā mukto ‘tra snānamātrataḥ || KM(Ś) 29.24 ||  
vibhīṣaṇaś ca vai bhātṛhatyādoṣān mahattarāt |  
tathā paraśurāmo ‘pi vīrahatyāvimuktaye || KM(Ś) 29.25 ||  
snānamātrāt sarvatīrthe tīrtheśasyāgrataś śubhe |  
mukto ‘bhūd rāvaṇāriś ca rāmo bhrātrāsahāgataḥ || KM(Ś) 29.26 ||  
hātvā droṇakṛpācāryapramukhān arjunas tathā |  
snātvā sarvottame sarvatīrthe vigatakalmaṣaḥ || KM(Ś) 29.27 ||  
babhūva śivatattvajñāḥ kīrtim avyāhatām yayau |  
aśvatthāmnā ca vai snātam bhrūṇahatyā vimuktaye || KM(Ś) 29.28 ||  
ye cānye manuḃ loka pitṛbhrātrvadhaiṣiṇaḥ |  
adyāpi sarvatīrthe ‘smin snātvā tīrtheśvaram gatāḥ || KM(Ś) 29.29 ||  
hatyādoṣād vimucyas te striyo martyāś ca bhūriśaḥ || KM(Ś) 29.30ab ||

bhadrakālīm samāhūya prāha śītāmśuśekharah |  
ayi bhadre priyam devyās samyagācaritam tvayā || KM(Ś) 45.109 ||  
muñcākhilam jalam śīghram karasthāt svakapālataḥ |  
yasmān mandikṛtam toyam praḷayāmbusamam tvayā || KM(Ś) 45.110 ||  
tasmāt praḷayamandākyā khyātā tiṣṭha mamāgrataḥ |  
ity uktayā tathā sarvam jalam muktaṃ kapālataḥ || KM(Ś) 45.111 ||  
svasya paścimadigbhāge haribrahmādisevitaḥ |

tajjalam sarvatīrthākhyam stambhayāmāsa tejasā || KM(Ś) 45.112 ||  
 brahmāpātyādipāpaghnam tat kāñcyām sarvatīrthakam |  
 tasyaiva smaraṇān nṛṇām jarāmaraṇanāśanam || KM(Ś) 45.113 ||

### *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*

śivāyai prītim āsthāya tasyā bhītiviktaye |  
 svajāṭhābhārajām gaṅgām bhūmau praḷayarūpiṇīm || KV 9.12 ||  
 dharāguptām tataḥ kṛtvā bhūmau pādena śaṅkaraḥ |  
 umākalyāṇam āsṛitya babhau kalyāṇaveṣataḥ || KV 9.13 ||  
 tataḥ praḷayabandhinyā kampāyāḥ praḷayāgame |  
 pūrvaṃ praḷayanāśāya nikṣiptam yatkapālakam || KV 9.14 ||  
 kampāmbhasā samāyuktam yāvat pātrāntavāriṇā |  
 tatkapālam babhau tatra vimuktapraḷayodakam || KV 9.15 ||  
 atha tattīrthamāhātmyam śrutvā gaury aṣṭavārsikā |  
 navayauvanasaundaryam kāmākṣantī śaṅkareṇa ca || KV 9.16 ||  
 anugrahītavākyoktavidhinā sā ca pārvatī |  
 tasya tīrthasya sopānasamyagāvaraṇādikān || KV 9.17 ||  
 kārayitvā mahāgaurī tatasā devaśilpinā |  
 sārđhatrikotiṭīrthaikyam gatayā kaṃpayā saha || KV 9.18 ||  
 sadā milītaṭīrthatvāt sarvatīrtham iti śrutām |  
 divyābhīdhām pratiṣṭhāpya tasya tīrthasya bhūpate || KV 9.19 ||  
 tasmin tīrthe [']tha sā snātvā navayauvanaśālīnī |  
 saundaryayuktā sā gaurī gatvā śobhām sumāṅgaḷām || KV 9.20 ||  
 taptakāṃcanasaṃkāsām kāmākṣīm kāmādāyinīm | KV 9.21ab |

namaskṛtyātha tīrthāya mahāgaurī varam dadau |  
 yātrayā sarvatīrtheṣu snānato yat phalam nṛṇām || KV 9.32 ||  
 darśanāt sarvatīrthasya tat phalam cāśnute śivam |  
 iti datvā varam gaurī punar nāthāntikam mudā || KV 9.33 ||  
 samāgatya praṇamyesaṃ tasya vāmāsanam mudā |  
 gatvā sā nityakalyāṇī babhau śṛṅgāraveṣataḥ || KV 9.34 ||  
 tadādi vartate tatra sarvatīrtham manoramam |  
 tasyām kāñcyām yatra yatra santi tīrthāni bhūpate || KV 9.35 ||  
 tatra tatrotakāleṣu snānato yat phalam labhet |  
 sarvatīrthe sakṛt snānāt tatsarvaphalam āśnute || KV 9.36 ||  
 purā tasmin sarvatīrthe bahavo mokṣakāmākṣiṇaḥ |  
 snātvā vimuktāḥ pāpaiś ca gatās te śāmbhavam padam || KV 9.37 ||

