
Chidambaram ShrINatarajastutih with Comments

ಚಿದಂಬರಂ ಶ್ರೀನಟರಾಜಸ್ತುತೀ ಅಥವಾ ಸಭಾಪತಿಸ್ತುತಿಃ

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Transliterated by : N.Balasubramanian bbalu at satyam.net.in

Proofread by : N.Balasubramanian bbalu at satyam.net.in

Translated by : N.Balasubramanian bbalu@satyam.net.in

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Send corrections to : sanskrit@cheerful.com

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ನಮಸ್ತೇ ರುದ್ರ ಮನ್ಯವ ಉತೋತ ಇಷವೇ ನಮಃ .
ನಮಸ್ತೇ ಅಸ್ತು ಧನ್ವನೇ ಕರಾಭ್ಯಾಂ ತೇ ನಮೋ ನಮಃ .. 1..
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Comments by N.Balasubramanian bbalu@satyam.net.in

The following abbreviations are used in the commentary.

SS - Shiva Sahasranamam (Padmapuranam with the commentary of Shri Paramasivendra Sarasvati)

VS - VishnuSahasranama. BG - Bhagavad Gita

The above verses are in praise of Lord Nataraja at the famous shrine in Chidambaram. They are from Suta Samhita, Mukti Kanda. The Suta Samhita talks about the glory of Chidambaram in chapters 9 and 10.

The puranas say that it is one of the most hallowed places on earth. For For vaishnavas, the word 'temple' refers to Shrirangam. Others refer to Chidambaram as 'temple'. It is one of the ಮುಕ್ತಿ ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರಂ - places where one gets liberation just by seeing it. The following verse says that.

ದರ್ಶನಾದಭ್ರಸದಸಿ, ಜನ್ಮನಃ ಕಮಲಾಲಯೇ .
 ಕಾಶ್ಯಾಂತು ಮರಣಾತ್ ಮುಕ್ತಿಃ, ಸ್ಮರಣಾದರುಣಾಚಲೇ ..

MEANING:- One gets liberated by seeing Chidambaram, by being born in Tiruvarur where there is the tank Kamalalaya, by dying at Kashi and by merely thinking of Arunachala. Chidambaram is also one of the places renowned as Kailas on earth where the Lord is ever present and confers liberation. The following verse says that.

ಸೇತುವಾತಪುರೀ ಚಿದಂಬರಸಭಾ ಗೋಕರ್ಣ-ಪಂಪಾಪುರೀ
 ಶ್ವೇತಾರಣ್ಯ-ವಟಾಟವೀ ಶ್ರುತಿಪುರೀ ಶೋಣಾದ್ರಿ ವೃದ್ಧಾಚಲಾಃ .
 ಕಾಂಚೀ ಶ್ರೀಗಿರಿ ಕಾಲಹಸ್ತಿನಗರೀ ಕೇದಾರ-ವಾರಾಣಸೀ
 ಕೈಲಾಸಾ ಇತಿ ಶಂಕರಸ್ಯ ನಿಲಯಾ ಖ್ಯಾತಾಶ್ಚ ಮುಕ್ತಿಪ್ರದಾಃ ..

Maharshi Jaimini, in his Vedapadastava ಶ್ರೀವೇದಪಾದಸ್ತವಃ says that one who utters the name Chidambaram sets out on his way to liberation.

ಚಿದಂಬರಮಿತಿ ಬ್ರೂಯಾತ್ ಸಕೃಜ್ಜನನವರ್ಜಿತಃ .

ಮುಕ್ತಿಘಂಟಾಮಣಿಪಥಂ ಮೋಕ್ಷಮೇವ ಸಮಶ್ನುತೇ ..

The holy place is said to be the heart (ಹೃದಯ ಸ್ಥಾನಂ) of the Virat Purusha representing the universe. The deities at other temples are said to merge with Nataraja after the last puja for the day is over and the temples are closed for the day.

THE TEMPLE:- The origin of the temple is lost in antiquity. Historical references to it take one back to 6th century CE. It was built in 10th century. Krishnadeva Raja, the king of Vijayanagar has also contributed to the building of the temple. It is a magnificent edifice and occupies a vast area of about 18 acres. Amongst the temples in India it occupies a pre-eminent place because of its antiquity, richness in terms of worship, the festival traditions and the architectural and sculptural profusion. Its association with music and dance is unique in nurturing the cultural heritage of our country. It has four towers of about 50 meters tall. They carry elaborate carvings including the 108 classical dance postures.

The sanctum is known as Kanaka Sabhaಕನಕ ಸಭಾ or the golden hall.

So, He is known asಕನಕಸಭಾಪತಿ Kanaka Sabhapati or simply as

ಸಭಾಪತಿ Sabhapati, Sabesan and Sabhanayakan. The Lord

also has the golden hue. He, therefore has the name (SS-273)

ಹಿರಣ್ಯಃ- ಹಿರಣ್ಯಸದೃಶ-ಸರ್ವಾಂಗೋ ಹಿರಣ್ಯಃ .

ಆಪ್ರಣಖಾತ್ಸರ್ವ ಏವ ಸುವರ್ಣ ಇತಿ ಶ್ರುತಿಃ..

He dances in the golden hall. The sabha or hall represents the heart.

One is advised to meditate on Him as available in the heart.

Taittiriya Upanishad (1-6)says this.

ಸ ಏಷೋಽನ್ತರ್ಹೃದಯ ಆಕಾಶಃ. ತಸ್ಮಿನ್ನಯಂ ಪುರುಷೋ ಮನೋಮಯಃ. ಅಮೃತೋ ಹಿರಣ್ಮಯಃ.

So, one who can see the Lord in the sabha or within the heart gets liberated. This is what is meant by saying quoted

above ದರ್ಶನಾದಭ್ರಸದಸಿ that one gets freed by seeing
Chidambaram. ದಭ್ರ = small or little. The small space in the
heart is referred to here. The Mundaka upanishad (3-1-3) makes this
abundantly clear.

ಯದಾ ಪಶ್ಯಃ ಪಶ್ಯತೇ ರುಕ್ಮವರ್ಣಂ ಕರ್ತಾರಮೀಶಂ ಪುರುಷಂ ಬ್ರಹ್ಮಯೋನಿಂ .
ತದಾ ವಿದ್ವಾನ್ಪುಣ್ಯಪಾಪೇ ವಿಧೂಯ ನಿರಂಜನಃ ಪರಮಂ ಸಾಮ್ಯಮುಪೈತಿ ..

MEANING:- When one sees the Purusha (Self within) - the One having
the colour of shining gold, the creator, the Lord and who is the source
then he becomes illuminated, completely shakes of all bondage (karmas
that bind and cause rebirth), becomes pure and becomes one with Him.
The same subject is also discussed in chapter 8 of Chandogyopanishad
wherin the subject is called ದಹರ ವಿದ್ಯಾ. ದಹರ means
small and the heart itself. It says:-

ಅಥ ಯದಿದಮಸ್ಮಿನ್ ಬ್ರಹ್ಮಪುರೇ ದಹರಂ ಪುಂಡರೀಕಂ ವೇಶ್ಮ
ದಹರೋಸ್ಮಿನ್ನಂತರಾಕಶ-ಸ್ತಸ್ಮಿನ್ ಯದಂತಸ್ತದನ್ವೇಷ್ಟ್ಯಂ,
ತದ್ವಾವ ವಿಜಿಜ್ಞಾಸಿತವ್ಯಮಿತಿ .. 1.1..

MEANING:- In this body there is a small house; in it there is space;
one should seek and find what is in it. The space is known as
ದಹರಾಕಾಶಂ small sky to differentiate it from the big sky we see
around us. Shri Krishna clearly talks about this more than once.

ಜ್ಯೋತಿಷಾಮಪಿ ತಜ್ಯೋತಿ-ಸ್ತಮಸಃ ಪರಮುಚ್ಯತೇ . ಜ್ಞಾನಂ ಜ್ಞೇಯಂ
ಜ್ಞಾನಗಮ್ಯಂ ಹೃದಿ ಸರ್ವಸ್ಯ ವಿಷ್ಠಿತಂ .. (BG 13-17)

again:-

ಸರ್ವಸ್ಯ ಚಾಹಂ ಹೃದಿ ಸನ್ನಿವಿಷ್ಟಃ ಮತ್ತಃ
ಸ್ಮೃತಿಜ್ಞಾನಮಪೋಹನಂ ಚ . ವೇದೈಶ್ಚ ಸರ್ವೈರಹಮೇವ ವೇದ್ಯಃ
ವೇದಾಂತಕೃದ್ವೇದವಿದೇವ ಚಾಹಂ ..(BG 15-15)

The gist of the above verses may be said as this. The Lord is seated
in the heart of all and is behind all their actions. He is of the
form of pure wisdom. He is to be known and can be known only by wisdom.

The following verse, also from the mouth of Krishna says that He is not
just sitting in the hearts, but enlivens every cell in the body.

ಈಶ್ವರಃ ಸರ್ವಭೂತಾನಾಂ ಹೃದ್ದೇಶೇರ್ಜುನ ತಿಷ್ಠತಿ .

ಭ್ರಾಮಯನ್ ಸರ್ವಭೂತಾನಿ ಯಂತ್ರಾರೂಢಾಣಿ ಮಾಯಯಾ .. (BG 18-61).

Modern science confirms the fact that cells in the body have intelligence. Even when one is asleep or in coma or under sedation, activities go on within the body of which one is not aware. The blood circulation goes on. Cells receive nutrition from the blood stream and exchange waste material and accept oxygen and so on. Similar activities take place within every living being including plants. This shows that the Lord in the form of consciousness pervades the entire universe. This activity of the Lord who is seated in the heart is called His dance.

To sum up, Chitಚಿತ್ means intelligence and also Brahman - the Supreme Being. Ambaram -ಅಂಬರಂ means the space or ether. The scriptures often compare Brahman to space, because they share many common attributes. For example space envelops everything - the entire universe - in fact and is imperceptible to senses. So, the place Chidambaram may be taken to be the external representation of the Chidambaram within every one.

For these reasons said above Chidambaram occupies a prime position in our culture comparable to Kashi and Rameshvaram. Our tradition says that one should make it a mission to visit Chidambaram and see the temple in one's lifetime - else the purpose of life is not fulfilled. The Tamil shaivaite saints, known as Nayanmars have gone ecstatic on seeing the Lord, sung at Chidambaram and poured out their joy in many songs in praise of the Lord . Normally a devotee prays to the Lord to spare him from the agony of rebirth. But one nayanmar wished that to drink in the divine beauty of the Lord at Chidambaram he should be born again and again. Another nayanmar says in one of his songs that any day that one does not talk of the Lord is wasted as he can be deemed to be not born on that day.

One unique feature of the temple at Chidambaram is that as one stands facing the sanctum of Nataraja, he can also have the darshan of Lord Ranganatha (ರಂಗನಾಥಃ) lying on His splendid serpent

bedಶೇಷ ಸಯನಂ and in the lotus that comes out of His navel is seated Lord Brahma the creator. Thus the fortunate visitor to the temple can have the darsan of all the three gods - Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva - at one go. Lord Nataraja is also the very personification of bliss. According to Saiva Agamic texts the ananda aspect of the Lord is represented by the form of Nataraja. The realisation of Nataraja's dance within the recess in the devotee's heart unites him with Shiva as said above. Ranganatha (who is Vishnu) is also bliss personified. He has the name

ಆನಂದಃ:- ಆನಂದಸ್ವರೂಪಮಸ್ಯೇತಿ ಆನಂದಃ, “ಏತಸ್ಯೈವಾನಂದಸ್ಯ ಅನ್ಯಾನಿ ಭೂತಾನಿ ಮಾತ್ರಾಮುಪಜೀವಂತಿ” ಇತಿ ಶ್ರುತೇಃ. (VS -526). He is also of golden hue says the sahasranama (737, 738) ಸುವರ್ಣವರ್ಣಃ, ಹೇಮಾಂಗಃ. He also shines in the devotees' hearts. The great Acharya Vedanta Deshika says this in his wonderful poem Shri Bhagavadhyana sopanam (ಶ್ರೀ ಭಗವದ್ಧ್ಯಾನ ಸೋಪಾನಂ). In fact this is the very first verse in the poem. Please note how wonderfully sweet is this verse.

ಅಂತರ್ಜ್ಯೋತಿಃ ಕಿಮಪಿಯಮಿನಾಮಂಜನಂ ಯೋಗದೃಷ್ಟೇಃ ಚಿಂತಾರತ್ನಂ ಸುಲಭಮಿಹ ನಃ ಸಿದ್ಧಿಮೋಕ್ಷಾನುರೂಪಂ . ದೀನಾನಾಥ ವ್ಯಸನಶಮನಂ ದೈವತಂ ದೈವತಾನಾಂ ದಿವ್ಯಂ ಚಕ್ಷುಃ ಶ್ರುತಿಪರಿಷದಾಂ ದೃಶ್ಯತೇ ರಂಗಮಧ್ಯೇ ..

Thus, He and Nataraja are one and the same but have different forms. The great scholar devotee Shri Appayya Dikshitar spent his last days in Chidambaram. He was a staunch advaitin and so saw no difference between the two - Nataraja and Ranganatha. He has composed a unique poem ಹರಿಹರ ಅಭೇದ ಸ್ತುತಿಃ wherein he says he sees no difference between the two. The Chidambaram temple has a separate shrine within the main temple dedicated to Devi who bears the name Shivakamasundari. She represents the Maya shakti of Shiva.

When Lord Nataraja is dancing at Chidambaram four persons - Patanjali, Vyagrapada, Nandhi and Bhringi are the blessed ones who witness the devine phenomenon. The first two are maharishis and the other two

are devarishis. Devarshis are deified divine sages, such as Atri, Bhrugu, Angiras etc. Thus Nandhi and Bhringi are always with the Lord. Just like the sun setting at a village in the evening also sets in all other places in the evening, so also Shiva dances at Chidambaram in the evenings implies that He dances in the evenings at other places too. The dance of Lord Shiva is described in the following verse from Shiva thandava stotram. The third line of the verse mentions who are all witnessing the dance.

ಅನಂತನವ-ರತ್ನ-ವಿಲಸತ್ಕಟಕ-ಕಿಂಕಿಣಿ-ಜ್ವಲಂಝಲಝಲಂಝಲರವಂ
ಮುಕುಂದ-ವಿಧಿ-ಹಸ್ತ-ಗತ-ಮದ್ದಲ-ಲಯದ್ವನಿ-ಧಿಮಿಧ್ಧಿಮಿತ-ನರ್ತನಂ .
ಶಕುಂತರಥ-ಬರ್ಹಿರಥ-ನಂದಿಮುಖ-ದಂತಿಮುಖ-ಭೃಂಗಿ-ರಿಟಿ-ಸಂಗ-ನಿಕಟಂ
ಸನಂದ-ಸನಕ-ಪ್ರಮುಖ-ವಂದಿತ-ಪದಂ ಪರ-ಚಿದಂಬರ-ನಟಂ ಹೃದಿ ಭಜ ..

ಶಕುಂತರಥ = one who has the bird as His vehicle -

ಶಕುಂತಃ= bird. ರಥಃ = chariot or vehicle. So,

the word ಶಕುಂತರಥ refers to Vishnu who has Garuda as

his vehicle. Next, ಬರ್ಹಿರಥ = One who has peacock as

His vehicle. ಬರ್ಹಿನ್ = peacock. So, the word ಬರ್ಹಿರಥ

refers to Kartikeya. ದಂತಿಮುಖ = one having the face of an

elephant. ದಂತಿನ್ = elephant. ಮುಖಂ = face. Refers to

Ganapati. ಭೃಂಗಿ-ರಿಟಿ-ಸಂಗ-ನಿಕಟಂ = The group consisting of those mentioned here, namely, Vishnu, Kartikeys, Nandi, Ganesha

and the sages Bhringi and Riti. ಸಂಗಂ = group. ನಿಕಟಂ

= nearby. Of course we have to include His consort Parvati Devi who

is always with Shiva. The last line asks us to meditate on the feet

of Nataraja which is worshipped by great sages such as Sanaka and

Sananda. Shiva as Nataraja and DakShinamurthy are facing the south

which is the direction presided over by Yama the god of death. By this

they show that those devotees who approach Him will not be bothered by

Yama. Both are having the demon Apasmara who represents ignorance or

avidya under their foot. Thus there is no difference between the two.

The Tamil saint Thirumular in his famous work Thirumandiram says that

the dance of Lord Nataraja symbolises His five acts. The five acts of

Lord Shiva are said in the following verse from Sarvadarsanasangraha (ಸರ್ವದರ್ಶನಸಂಗ್ರಹಃ). They are creation, preservation, destruction, obscuration and blessing.

ಪಂಚವಿಧಂ ತತ್ಕೃತ್ಯಂ ಸೃಷ್ಟಿ-ಸ್ಥಿತಿ-ಸಂಹಾರ-ತಿರೋಭಾವಃ .
ತದ್ವದನುಗ್ರಹಕರಣಂ ಪ್ರೋಕ್ತಂ ಸತತೋದಿತಸ್ಯಾಸ್ಯ ..ಇತಿ.

The small drum He holds in His hand signifies SRISHTI or creation; the lower right hand that offers protection signifies STHITI or preservation; the upper right hand that holds the flame stands for destruction; the foot that keeps down the asura Apasmara indicates TIROBHAVA or obscuration and finally the perennial dance indicates ANUGRAHA or blessing; all these to bless the devotees. The Lalitha Sahasranama mentions all these five actions.

ಸೃಷ್ಟಿಕರ್ತ್ರೇ ಬ್ರಹ್ಮರೂಪಾ ಗೋಪ್ತೀ ಗೋವಿಂದರೂಪಿಣೀ .. 114..
ಸಂಹಾರಿಣೀ ರುದ್ರರೂಪಾ ತಿರೋಧಾನಕರೀಶ್ವರೀ .
ಸದಾಶಿವಾನುಗ್ರಹಾ ಪಂಚಕೃತ್ಯಪರಾಯಣಾ .. 115..

LEGEND:- Sage Saunaka once met Nandhikeshvara and expressed his desire to see the dance of the Lord. Nandhikeshvara said that himself, Uma Devi, Lord Ganesha and Lord Guha witness His dance in Kailasa every day in the evenings as said above. The time is known as ಪ್ರದೋಷ time. ಪ್ರದೋಷೋ ರಜನೀಮುಖಂ says Amara the Sanskrit dictionary. It is the time of onset of night. It is auspicious and is to be devoted exclusively for prayer and meditation. Nandhikeshvara replied saying that it is not easily available to others. If he went to Chidambaram, took bath in the Shivaganga tank, chanted the holy panchakshara mantra and also worshipped Lord Sabhapathy for one year then he can witness His dance in the following year. He should start the program from the holy month of Dhanus (9th month in the solar calendar). Sage Saunaka did exactly as advised by Nandhikeshvara and could witness the dance of Shiva in the following year in the Dhanus month on the day presided by Ardhra star. The day is celebrated in Chidambaram as Ardra Darshanam. Thousands of devotees gather at Chidambaram to witness the celebrations. The sages who had

assembled in the holy place Naimisharanya heard the above story from Suta who knows and narrates the puranas. They expressed a desire to witness the dance. Suta prayed to his guru Sage Vyasa who appeared there immediately. Shri Vyasa advised them to go to Chidambaram and repeat the same program as prescribed by Nandhikeshvara to Saunaka. The sages successfully completed the program and as a result could enjoy the divine dance. They praised the Lord Nataraja with the above hymn which contains the essence and wordings of the famous vedic hymn Shri Rudra. The Kaivalyopanishad says that one who recites the hymn Shri Rudra is absolved of all sins.

ಯಃ ಶತರುದ್ರೀಯಮಧೀತೇ ಸೋಽಗ್ನಿಪೂತೋ ಭವತಿ, ಸುರಾಪಾನಾತ್ಪೂತೋ ಭವತಿ,

ಬ್ರಹ್ಮಹತ್ಯಾತ್ಪೂತೋ ಭವತಿ, ತಸ್ಮಾದವಿಮುಕ್ತಮಾಶ್ರಿತೋ ಭವತಿ.

This hymn being a condensation of Shri Rudra is bound to grant similar benefits on the reader.

SAGE PATANJALI:-

Any talk about Chidambaram will be incomplete without a mention of Sage Patanjali. He was an incarnation of the serpent king Sesha who serves Lord Vishnu. He heard about the glory of the dance of Shiva and became very eager to witness the grand spectacle. At the same time he was reluctant to leave the service of Lord Vishnu. The Lord could divine what was going on in Sesha's mind and granted him permission to leave His services for some time. He advised Sesha to go to earth to Chidambaram and pray to Lord Shiva. Accordingly Sesha came down to earth to Chidambaram which was covered by dense forest at that time. There he met another sage by name Vyagrapada who was worshipping Shiva. Shiva was pleased by their intense devotion. HE appeared before them and granted them their desire to witness His sacred dance. They are blessed to witness the dance every day in the evening from that time. This happened in the first yuga known as Krita Yuga. Patanjali was the first incarnation of Sesha. In the following Tretha Yuga he was born as Lakshmana and served the Lord

born as Rama. In the next yuga known as Dwapara Yuga he took birth as Rama (Balarama) the elder brother of Shri Krishna.

STUNNING FEATURES OF ARCHITECTURAL EXCELLENCY:

The place where temple located is the center point of world's magnetic equator. Three of the five Panchaboothasthala temples, those at Kalahasti, Kanchipuram and Chidambaram all stand on a straight line exactly at 79 degree 41 minutes East longitude - truly an engineering, astrological and geographical wonder. Of the other two temples, Tiruvanaikkaval is located at around 3 degrees to the south and exactly 1 degree to the west of the northern tip of this divine axis, while Tiruvannamalai is around midway (1.5 degree to the south and 0.5 degree to the west).

The 9 gateways signify the 9 orifices in the human body.

The Chitsabai or Ponnambalam, the sanctum sanctorum represents the heart which is reached by a flight of 5 stairs called the PanchakShara steps - pancha meaning 5, akShara - indestructible syllables - SI VA YA NA MA, from a raised anterior dias - the Kanakasabai. The access to the Sabhai is through the sides of the stage (and not from the front as in most temples). The Chit sabha roof is supported by four pillars symbolic of the four Vedas .

The Ponnambalam or the Sanctum sanctorum is held by 28 pillars - representing the 28 agamas or set methodologies for the worship of Shiva. The roof is held by a set of 64 beams representing the 64 forms of art and is held by several cross-beams representing the innumerable blood vessels. The roof has been laid by 21,600 golden tiles with the word SIVAYANAMA inscribed on them representing 21600 breaths one takes in a day. The golden tiles are fixed using 72,000 golden nails which represents the no. of nadis exists in human body. The roof is topped by a set of 9 sacred pots or kalasas, representing the 9 forms of energy. The ardhmandapa (sanctum) has six pillars denoting the six shastras (holy texts). The hall next to the ardhmandapa has eighteen pillars symbolizing the eighteen Puranas. Shri

Nataraj Mandir at Satara is a replica of this temple.

Now, let us end this commentary with a prayer to the Cosmic

Dancer. This is a verse that gives a picture of the dancing

Nataraja. It explains the significance of the pose of Nataraja in

His dance.


ಲೋಕಾನಾಹೂಯ ಸರ್ವಾನ್ ಡಮರುಕನಿನದೈಃ ಘೋರಸಂಸಾರಮಗ್ನಾನ್
ದತ್ವಾಭೀತಿಂ ದಯಾಲುಃ ಪ್ರಣತಭಯಹರಂ ಕುಂಚಿತಂ ವಾಮಪಾದಂ .

ಉದ್ಧೃತ್ಯೇದಂ ವಿಮುಕ್ತೇರಯನಮಿತಿ ಕರಾತ್ ದರ್ಶಯನ್ ಪ್ರತ್ಯಯಾರ್ಥಂ
ಬಿಭ್ರದ್ವಕ್ಷಿಂ ಸ ಪಾಯಾತ್ ಕಲಯತಿ ನಟನಂ ಚಿತ್ರಭಾಯಾಂ ಶಿವೋ ಯಃ ..


Meaning: The Lord calls the people struggling in the violent sea of
samsara by the sound of the small drum in the right upper hand. By His
right lower hand He says "do not be afraid" and offers protection from
fear. He indicates by His left hand His left foot that is slightly bent
as the path to freedom from the frightful samsara sea. He induces the
confidence of the people by holding the fire in His left upper hand.

Let such a Lord who is dancing in the chit sabha protect us.

Encoded and proofread N.Balasubramanian bbalu@satyam.net.in

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Chidambaram ShrINatarajastutih with Comments

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Please send corrections to sanskrit@cheerful.com

