

Chidambaram ShrINatarajastutih with Comments

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சித³ம்ப³ரம் ஸ்ரீநடராஜஸ்துதீ அத²வா ஸபா⁴பதிஸ்துதி:

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சித³ம்ப³ரம் ஸ்ரீநடராஜஸ்துதீ அத²வா ஸபா⁴பதிஸ்துதி:



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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 முக்தி க்ஷேத்ரம் - places where one gets liberation just by seeing it. The following verse says that.

த³ர்ஸநாத³ப்⁴ரஸத³ஸி, ஜந்மந: கமலாலயே |

காஸ்யாந்து மரணத் முக்தி:, ஸ்மரணத்³ருணாசலே ||

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.

ஸேதுர்வாதபுரீ சித³ம்ப³ரஸபா⁴ கோ³கர்ண-பம்பாபுரீ
ஸ்வேதாரண்ய-வடாடவீ ஸ்ருதிபுரீ ஸோணா³ரி வ்ரு³த்³தா⁴சலா: |
காஞ்சீ ஸ்ரீகிரீ காலஹஸ்திநக³ரீ கேதா³ர-வாராணஸீ
கைலாஸா இதி ஸங்கரஸ்ய நிலயா க்²யாதாஸ்ச முக்திப்ரதா:³ ||

Maharshi Jaimini, in his Vedapadastava ஸ்ரீவேத³பாத³ஸ்தவ: says that one who utters the name Chidambaram sets out on his way to liberation.

சித³ம்ப³ரமிதி ப்³ரூயாத் ஸக்ரு³ஜ்ஜநநவ்ரஜித: |
முக்திக⁴ண்டாமணிபத²ம் மோக்ஷமேவ ஸமஸ்ருதே ||

The holy place is said to be the heart (ஹ்ரு³த்³ய ஸ்தா²நம்) 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 Historical references to it take one back to 6th century CE.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 Sabhaகநக ஸபா⁴ or the golden hall. So, He is known asகநகஸபா⁴பதி Kanaka Sabhapati or simply as ஸபா⁴பதி Sabhapati, Sabesan and Sabhanayakan. The Lord also has the golden hue. He, therefore has the name (SS-273)

ஹிரண்ய:- ஹிரண்யஸுத்³ரு³ஸ-ஸர்வாங்கோ³ ஹிரண்ய: |
ஆப்ரணகா²த்ஸர்வ ஏவ ஸுவர்ண இதி ஸ்ருதி: ||

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.

ஸ ஏஷோ஽ந்தர்ஹ்ருதீய ஆகாஸ: | தஸ்மிந்நயம் புருஷோ மநோமய: | அம்ருதோ
ஹிரண்மய: |

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

யதா³ பர்ய: பர்யதே ருக்மவர்ணம் கர்தாரமீஸம் புருஷம் பீரஹ்மயோநிம் |

ததா³ விதீவாந்புண்யபாபே விதூய நிரஞ்ஜந: பரமம் ஸாம்யமுபைதி ||

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 wherein the subject is called தீஹர விதீயா | தீஹர means small and the heart itself. It says:-

அதீ யதீதீமஸ்மிந் பீரஹ்மபுரே தீஹரம் புண்டீரீகம் வேஸம்

தீஹரோ஽ஸ்மிந்நந்தராகஸ-ஸ்தஸ்மிந் யதீந்தஸ்ததீநீவேஷ்டவ்யம்,

ததீவாவ விஜிஞ்ஞாஸிதவ்யமிதி || 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 தீஹராகாஸம் small sky to differentiate it from the big sky we see around us. Shri Krishna clearly talks about this more than once.

ஜ்யோதிஷாமபி தஜ்ஜ்யோதி-ஸ்தமஸ: பரமுச்யதே | ஜ்ஞாநம் ஜ்ஞேயம்

ஜ்ஞாநகீம்யம் ஹ்ருதீ³ ஸர்வஸ்ய விஷ்டிதம் || (BG 13-17)

again:-

ஸர்வஸ்ய சாஹம் ஹ்ருதீ³ ஸந்நிவிஷ்ட: மத்த:

ஸம்ரு³திர்ஜ்ஞாநமபோஹநம் ச | வேதை³ஸ்ச ஸர்வைரஹமேவ வேத³ய:
வேதா³ந்தகரு³த்³வேத³விதே³வ சாஹம் || (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.

ஈஸ்வர: ஸர்வபூ⁴தாநாம் ஹரு³த்³தே³ஸே³ஸ்ரஜூந திஷ்டதி |
ப⁴ராமயந் ஸர்வபூ⁴தாநி யந்த்ரா⁴டா⁴ணி மாயயா || (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 nutriron from the blood stream and exchange waste material and accept oxygeon 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, Chitசித் means intelligence and also Brahman - the Supreme Being. Ambaram -அம்ப³ரம் 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 (ரங்க³நாத²) lying on His splendid serpent bed¹ 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

ஆநந்த³:- ஆநந்த³ஸ்வரூபமஸ்யேதி ஆநந்த³, “ஏதஸ்யைவாநந்த³ஸ்ய அந்யாநி பூ⁴தாநி மாத்ராமுபஜீவந்தி” இதி ஸ்ருதே: | (VS -526). He is also of golden hue says the sahasranama (737, 738) ஸுவர்ணவர்ண:, ஹேமாங்க³! He also shines in the devotees' hearts. The great Acharya Vedanta Deshika says this in his wonderful poem Shri Bhagavadhyana soproanam (ஸ்ரீ ப⁴க³வத்³த்யாந ஸோபாநம்). In fact this is the very first verse in the poem. Please note how wonderfully sweet is this verse.

அந்தர்ஜ்யோதி: கிம்பியமிநாமஞ்ஜநம் யோக³த்³ருஷ்டே: சிந்தாரதநம்
ஸுலப⁴மிஹ ந: ஸித்³தி⁴மோக்ஷாநுரூபம் | தீ³நாநாத² வ்யஸநஸமநம்
தை³வதம் தை³வதாநாம் தி³வ்யம் சக்ஷு: ஸ்ருதிபரிஷதா³ம் த்³ரு³ஸ்யதே
ரங்க³மத்⁴யே ||

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 ஹரிஹர அபே⁴த³ ஸ்துதி: 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 divine phenomenon. The first two are maharishis and the other two are devarishis. Devarshis are deified divine sages, such as Atri, Bhrgu, 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.

அநந்தநவ-ரத்தந-விலஸத்கடக-கிங்கிணி-ஜஃஹுலஞ்ஜ²லஜ²லஞ்ஜ²லரவம்
 முகுந்த³-விதி⁴-ஹஸ்த-க³த-மத்³த³ல-யயத்⁴வநி-தி⁴மித்³தி⁴மித-நர்தநம் |
 ஸகுந்தரத²-ப³ர்ஹிரத²-நந்தி³முக²-த³ந்திமுக²-ப⁴ரு³ங்கி³-ரிடி-ஸங்க³-நிகடம்
 ஸநந்த³-ஸநக-ப்ரமுக²-வந்தி³த-பத³ம் பர-சித³ம்ப³ர-நடம் ஹ்ரு³தி³ ப⁴ஜ ||

ஸகுந்தரத² = one who has the bird as His vehicle -
 ஸகுந்த:= bird. ரத:² = chariot or vehicle. So,
 the word ஸகுந்தரத² refers to Vishnu who has Garuda as
 his vehicle. Next, ப³ர்ஹிரத² = One who has peacock as
 His vehicle. ப³ர்ஹிந் = peacock. So, the word ப³ர்ஹிரத²
 refers to Kartikeya. த³ந்திமுக² = one having the face of an
 elephant. த³ந்திந் = elephant. முக²ம் = face. Refers to
 Ganapati. ப⁴ரு³ங்கி³-ரிடி-ஸங்க³-நிகடம் = The group consisting
 of those mentioned here, namely, Vishnu, Kartikeys, Nandi, Ganesh

and the sages Bhringi and Riti. ஸங்க³ம் = group. நிகடம் = 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 (ஸர்வதர்ஸநஸங்க்³ரஹ:). They are creation, preservation, destruction, obscuration and blessing.

பஞ்சவித⁴ம் தத்க்ரு³த்யம் ஸ்ரு³ஷ்டி-ஸ்தி²தி-ஸம்ஹார-திரோபா⁴வ: |
தத்³வத³நுக்³ரஹகரணம் ப்ரோக்தம் ஸததோதி³தஸ்யாஸ்ய || இதி |

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.

ஸ்ரு³ஷ்டிகர்த்ரீ ப்³ரஹ்மரூபா கோ³ப்த்ரீ கோ³விந்த³ரூபிணீ || 114 ||

ஸம்ஹாரிணீ ருத்³ரரூபா திரோதா⁴நகர்ஸ்வீ |
ஸதா³ஸிவா³நுக்³ரஹ்தா³ பஞ்சக்ரு³த்யபராயணா || 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 ப்ரதோ³ஷ time. ப்ரதோ³ஷோ ரஜநீ³முக²ம் 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.

ய: ஸதருத்³ரீயமதீ⁴தே ஸோ⁵க்³நிபூதோ ப⁴வதி, ஸுராபாநாத்பூதோ ப⁴வதி,
ப³ரஹ்மஹத்யாத்பூதோ ப⁴வதி, தஸ்மாத³விமுக்த்தமாஸ்ரிதோ ப⁴வதி।

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 ime 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 ardha mantapa 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.

லோகாநாஹூய ஸர்வாந் ட³மருகநிநதை:³ கோ⁴ரஸம்ஸாரமக்³நாந்
த³வாபீ⁴திம் த³யாலு: ப்ரணதப⁴யஹரம் குஞ்சிதம் வாமபாத³ம் |
உத்³த்⁴ரு³த்யேத³ம் விமுக்³தேரயநமிதி கராத் த³ர்ஸயந் ப்ரத்யயார்த்²ம்
பி³ப்⁴ரத்³வஹ்நிம் ஸ பாயாத் கலயதி நடநம் சிதஸபா⁴யாம் ஸிவோ ய: ||

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.

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Please send corrections to sanskrit@cheerful.com

