चिदम्बरं श्रीनटराजस्तुतिः

Chidambaram ShriNatarajastutih with Comments

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नमस्ते रुद्र मन्यव उत्तोत इष्ये नमः।
नमस्ते अस्तु प्रनवने कराभ्यां ते नमो नमः। ॥ १॥
याते रुद्र शिवा तनूः शान्ता तस्येन नमो नमः।
नमोडस्तु नीतिस्ह्रीवाय सहस्राश्य ते नमः। ॥ २॥
सहस्रपाणेये तुभ्य भीणुद्रमाय ते नमः।
कर्पाद्वे नमस्तुभ्य कालरूपाय ते नमः। ॥ ३॥
नमस्ते चात्तुराश्य नमस्ते शृंपाणेये।
हिरण्यपाणेये तुभ्य हिरण्यपत्येन नमः। ॥ ४॥
नमस्ते वृक्षरूपाय हरिकेशाय ते नमः।
पशुनां पत्ये तुभ्य पदीनां पत्ये नमः। ॥ ५॥
पुष्यानां पत्ये तुभ्य क्षेत्राणां पत्ये नमः।
आत्तावचकरूपाय वनानां पत्ये नमः। ॥ ६॥
रोहिताय स्तम्पत्ये वृक्षाणां पत्ये नमः।
नमस्ते मचनिर्वा साध्याकाश्यां पत्येन नमः। ॥ ७॥
ओपधीनां च पत्ये नमः साध्यात्मरातमेन।
उच्चाौष्णूय देवाय प्यानां पत्ये नमः। ॥ ८॥
सत्यानां पत्ये तुभ्य घनानां पत्येन नमः।
सहमानाय शान्ताय शंकराय नमो नमः। ॥ ९॥
आधीनां पत्ये तुभ्य व्याधिने पत्येन नमः।
कक्कुभाय नमस्तुभ्य नमोडस्तु निषोध्येन। ॥ १०॥
सत्यानां पत्ये तुभ्य घनानां पत्येन नमः।
तस्कराणां नमस्तुभ्य पत्यपापहारिण। ॥ ११॥
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 vaishnavas, the word ‘temple’ refers to Shrirangam. Others refer to Chidambaram as ‘temple’. It is one of the मुक्ति क्षेत्रम् - places where one gets liberation just by seeing it. The following verse says that.

दर्शनाद्भ्रस्तदिसिः, जनमः कमलायं।
काश्यपानु मरणान्तः मुक्ति:, स्मरणाद्भ्रात्राचः॥

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.

सेतुवाणिजयभा चिदंबरसभा द्वारक.पम्मापुरी
श्रेस्तरपथार.पटाटवी श्रुतिपुरी शोणादिद्र कृदाचल्या:।
कान्ती श्रीवरिल कालहस्तिनगरी केदार.वाराणसी
कैलासा इति वंकरस्य निलिया व्यातास्थ मुक्तिप्रदा:॥

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

चिदंबरमिः ब्राह्यत सक्तक्षणमनवजिः।
मुक्तिघण्टामणिपथं मोक्षमेव समश्चुते॥

The holy place is said to be the heart (हृदय स्थानम) 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 Sabha कनक सभा or the golden hall. So, He is known as कनकसभापति Kanaka Sabhapati or simply as सभापति Sabhapati, Sabesan and Sabhanayakan. The Lord also has the golden hue. He, therefore has the name (SS-273)
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.
Taittariya Upanishad (1-6)says this.

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

यदा पदयः पदयते रुक्मिवर्णं कर्तारमिश्रं पुरुषं ब्रह्मयोनिम्
तदा विद्वानपुन्यपापे विधूय निरञं: परमं साम्यपैति ||

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 दहर विचा। दहर means small and the heart itself. It says:-

अथ यदिद्गमिस्मि व्रह्मपुरे दहरं पुण्डरीकेक वेदम
दहरेऽसिमिच्छन्तराकशा-स्तरिमिस्मि यदन्तरात्तन्तरेण्वेश्वर्यं
तदाव विज्ञासित्वय्यमिति || १.१ ||

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

ज्योतिषायथि तत्वयोति-स्तमसं: परमयोऽयते। ज्ञानं ध्ययं
ज्ञानगम्यं हृदि सर्वस्य विदितदम् || (BG 13-17)

again:-
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.

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, Chit means intelligence and also Brahman - the Supreme Being. Ambaram 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 (रजनाथः) lying on His splendid serpent bed शेष सयनम् 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

आनन्दः:- आनन्दसवस्तुपमसयेति आनन्दः, “पत्त्वेवानन्दसय अन्यानि भूतानि मात्रामुच्तेविनि” इति श्रुते:। (VS -526). He is also of golden hue says the sahasranama (737, 738) सुवण्वणः, हेमा:। He also shines in the devotees’ hearts. The great Acharya Vedanta Deshika says this in his wonderful poem Shri Bhagavaddhyana sopanam (श्री भगवद्भ्यान सोपानम). In fact this is the very first verse in the poem. Please note how wonderfully sweet is this verse.

अनन्दत्वति: किमपिमिनामजनं योगस्तः: चिन्तारं 
सुवण्वणः न: सिद्धिमोक्षात्सुसुप्तम।। दीनानाथ: व्यसनश्चरमं 
दैवतं दैवतानां दिव्यं चब्बः: श्रुतिपरिपं दृढः: 
रजनाथः॥
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 हिरहर अभेद नुितः 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, 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.

अनन्तनव-रथ-विठस्तकर-किणिणि-ज्ञहुव्ज्ञठझठझ्न्न्डरज्ञज्ञ
मुकुन्द-बिधि-हस्त-गत-मद्त-त्यथवनि-धिमिधिमित-नतेनम्।
शकुन्तरथ-बहिरथ-नन्दिमुख-दन्तिमुख-भृजि-रिटि-सज्ज-निकर्ते
शनन्द-सनक-प्रमुख-वन्दित-पदं पर-चिदम्बर-नंटे वदिभज॥

शकुन्तरथ = one who has the bird as His vehicle - शकुः = bird. रथः = chariot or vehicle. So, the word शकुन्तरथ refers to Vishnu who has Garuda as his vehicle. Next, बहिरथ = One who has peacock as His vehicle. बोहिन्न = peacock. So, the word बहिरथ refers to Kartikeya. 

दन्तिमुख = one having the face of an elephant. दन्ति = elephant. मुखम = face. Refers to Ganapati. भृजि-रिटि-सज्ज-निकर्ते = The group consisting
of those mentioned here, namely, Vishnu, Kartikeys, Nandi, Ganesha and the sages Bhringi and Riti. सम = group. निकटम = 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 (सवदशनस्मृति) . They are creation, preservation, destruction, obscuration and blessing.

पञ्चविंद्र तत्त्वक्त्वं सृष्टि-स्थिति-संहार-तिरोभावः ।
तद्दनुष्यहकरणं प्रोक्तं सततोदितस्यास्य ॥ इति।

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.

सृष्टिकृत्री व्रतरूपा गोऽस्री गोविन्दरूपिणी ॥ ११४॥
संहारिणी रुद्ररूपा तिरोधानकरीभ्यरी ।
सदाशिवासुन्यह्वा वर्तकृत्यपरायणा ॥ ११५॥

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 प्रदोष time.
प्रदोषो रजनीमुखम् 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 Ardra 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.

य: शत्रुद्धयमथीते सोऽशिक्षिपूर्तो भवति, सुरापानात्मृतो भवति,
ब्रह्महत्यात्मृतो भवति, तस्मादविमुक्तमाधित्यो भवति।

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 EXCELLENCE:

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 ardhamandapa (sanctum) has six pillars denoting the six shastras (holy texts). The hall next to the ardha mantapaa 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.

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