
Chidambaram ShrINatarajastutih with Comments

चिदम्बरं श्रीनटराजस्तुती अथवा सभापतिस्तुतिः

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नमस्ते रुद्र मन्यव उतोत इषवे नमः ।
नमस्ते अस्तु धन्वने कराभ्यां ते नमो नमः ॥ १ ॥
याते रुद्र शिवा तनूः शान्ता तस्यै नमो नमः ।
नमोऽस्तु नीलग्रीवाय सहस्राक्षाय ते नमः ॥ २ ॥
सहस्रपाणये तुभ्यं मीढुष्टमाय ते नमः ।
कपर्दिने नमस्तुभ्यं कालरूपाय ते नमः ॥ ३ ॥
नमस्ते चात्तशस्त्राय नमस्ते शूलपाणये ।
हिरण्यपाणये तुभ्यं हिरण्यपतये नमः ॥ ४ ॥
नमस्ते वृक्षरूपाय हरिकेशाय ते नमः ।
पशूनां पतये तुभ्यं पथीनां पतये नमः ॥ ५ ॥
पुष्टानां पतये तुभ्यं क्षेत्राणां पतये नमः ।
आतताविस्वरूपाय वनानां पतये नमः ॥ ६ ॥
रोहिताय स्तपतये वृक्षाणां पतये नमः ।
नमस्ते मन्त्रिणे साक्षात् कक्षाणां पतये नमः ॥ ७ ॥
ओषधीनां च पतये नमः साक्षात्परात्मने ।
उच्चैर्घोषाय देवाय पत्तीनां पतये नमः ॥ ८ ॥
सत्वानां पतये तुभ्यं घनानां पतये नमः ।
सहमानाय शान्ताय शंकराय नमो नमः ॥ ९ ॥
आधीनां पतये तुभ्यं व्याधीनं पतये नमः ।
ककुभाय नमस्तुभ्यं नमस्तेऽस्तु निषङ्गिणे ॥ १० ॥
स्तेनानां पतये तुभ्यं धनानां पतये नमः ।
तस्कराणां नमस्तुभ्यं पतये पापहारिणे ॥ ११ ॥

वञ्चते परिवञ्चते स्तायूनां पतये नमः ।
नमो निचेरवे तुभ्यं अरण्यानां पतये नमः ॥ १२ ॥
उष्णीषिणे नमस्तुभ्यं नमस्ते परमात्मने ।
विस्तृताय नमस्तुभ्यं आसीनाय नमोनमः ॥ १३ ॥
शयनाय नमस्तुभ्यं सुषुप्ताय नमो नमः ।
प्रबुद्धाय नमस्तुभ्यं स्थिराय परमात्मने ॥ १४ ॥
सभारूपाय ते नित्यं सभायाः पतये नमः ।
नमः शिवाय साम्बाय ब्रह्मणे सर्वसाक्षिणे ॥ १५ ॥
॥ इति सूतसंहितायां मुक्तिकाण्डे सभापतिस्तुतिः सम्पूर्णम् ॥

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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 मुक्ति क्षेत्रम् -

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

दर्शनादभ्रसदसि, जन्मनः कमलालये ।

काश्यान्तु मरणात् मुक्तिः, स्मरणादरुणाचले ॥

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.

सेतुर्वातपुरी चिदम्बरसभा गोकर्ण-पम्पापुरी
श्वेतारण्य-वटाटवी श्रुतिपुरी शोणाद्रि वृद्धाचलाः ।
काञ्ची श्रीगिरि कालहस्तिनगरी केदार-वाराणसी
कैलासा इति शंकरस्य निलया ख्याताश्च मुक्तिप्रदाः ॥

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

चिदम्बरमिति ब्रूयात् सकृज्जननवर्जितः ।
मुक्तिघण्टामणिपथं मोक्षमेव समश्नुते ॥

The holy place is said to be the heart (हृदय स्थानम्) 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 Sabhaकनक सभा or the golden hall. So, He is known asकनकसभापति Kanaka Sabhapati or simply as सभापति Sabhapati, Sabesan and Sabhanayakan. The Lord also has the golden hue. He, therefore has the name (SS-273)

हिरण्यः- हिरण्यसदृश-सर्वाङ्गो हिरण्यः ।
आप्रणखात्सर्व एव सुवर्ण इति श्रुतिः ॥

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.

स एषोऽन्तर्हृदय आकाशः । तस्मिन्नयं पुरुषो मनोमयः । अमृतो हिरण्मयः ।

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 दर्शनादभ्रसदसि that one gets freed by seeing

Chidambaram. दभ्र = small or little. The small space in the heart is referred to here. The Mundaka upanishad (3-1-3) makes this abundantly clear.

यदा पश्यः पश्यते रुक्मवर्णं कर्तारमीशं पुरुषं ब्रह्मयोनिम् ।
तदा विद्वान्पुण्यपापे विधूय निरञ्जनः परमं साम्यमुपैति ॥

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

अथ यदिदमस्मिन् ब्रह्मपुरे दहरं पुण्डरीकं वेश्म
दहरोऽस्मिन्नन्तराकश-स्तस्मिन् यदन्तस्तदन्वेष्टव्यं,
तद्वाव विजिज्ञासितव्यमिति ॥ 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 दहराकाशम् small sky to differentiate it from the big sky we see around us. Shri Krishna clearly talks about this more than once.

ज्योतिषामपि तज्ज्योति-स्तमसः परमुच्यते । ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं
ज्ञानगम्यं हृदि सर्वस्य विष्टितम् ॥ (BG 13-17)

again:-

सर्वस्य चाहं हृदि सन्निविष्टः मत्तः
स्मृतिर्ज्ञानमपोहनं च । वेदैश्च सर्वैरहमेव वेद्यः
वेदान्तकृद्वेदविदेव चाहम् ॥ (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.

ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशेऽर्जुन तिष्ठति ।

भ्रामयन् सर्वभूतानि यन्त्रारूढाणि मायया ॥ (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, Chitचित् means intelligence and also Brahman - the Supreme Being. Ambaram -अम्बरम् 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 (रङ्गनाथः) lying on His splendid serpent bedशेष 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- आनन्दस्वरूपमस्येति आनन्दः, “एतस्यैवानन्दस्य अन्यानि भूतानि मात्रामुपजीवन्ति” इति श्रुतेः। (VS -526). He is also of golden hue says the sahasranama (737, 738) सुवर्णवर्णः, हेमाङ्गः। He also shines in the devotees' hearts. The great Acharya Vedanta Deshika says this in his wonderful poem Shri Bhagavadhyana sapanam (श्री भगवद्भ्यान सोपानम्). In fact this is the very first verse in the poem. Please note how wonderfully sweet is this verse.

अन्तर्ज्योतिः किमपियमिनामञ्जनं योगदृष्टेः चिन्तारत्नं
सुलभमिह नः सिद्धिमोक्षानुरूपम् । दीनानाथ व्यसनशमनं
दैवतं दैवतानां दिव्यं चक्षुः श्रुतिपरिषदां दृश्यते
रङ्गमध्ये ॥

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 हरिहर अभेद स्तुतिः 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. Devarishis 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.

अनन्तनव-रत्न-विलसत्कटक-किङ्किणि-ज्जहलज्जलझलज्जलरवं
मुकुन्द-विधि-हस्त-गत-महल-लयध्वनि-धिमिद्धिमित-नर्तनम् ।
शकुन्तरथ-बर्हिरथ-नन्दिमुख-दन्तिमुख-भृङ्गि-रिति-सङ्ग-निकटं
सनन्द-सनक-प्रमुख-वन्दित-पदं पर-चिदम्बर-नटं हृदि भज ॥

शकुन्तरथ = one who has the bird as His vehicle -

शकुन्तः= bird. रथः = chariot or vehicle. So,

the word शकुन्तरथ refers to Vishnu who has Garuda as his vehicle. Next, बर्हिरथ = One who has peacock as His vehicle. बर्हिन् = peacock. So, the word बर्हिरथ

refers to Kartikeya. दन्तिमुख = one having the face of an elephant. दन्तिन् = elephant. मुखम् = face. Refers to Ganapati. भृङ्गि-रिति-सङ्ग-निकटं = The group consisting

of those mentioned here, namely, Vishnu, Kartikeys, Nandi, Ganesha and the sages Bhringi and Riti. सङ्गम् = group. निकटम् = 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 (सर्वदर्शनसङ्ग्रहः). They are creation, preservation, destruction, obscuration and blessing.

पञ्चविधं तत्कृत्यं सृष्टि-स्थिति-संहार-तिरोभावः ।
तद्दनुग्रहकरणं 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.

सृष्टिकर्त्री ब्रह्मरूपा गोप्त्री गोविन्दरूपिणी ॥ ११४ ॥
संहारिणी रुद्ररूपा तिरोधानकरीश्वरी ।
सदाशिवाऽनुग्रहदा पञ्चकृत्यपरायणा ॥ 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 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.

यः शतरुद्रीयमधीते सोऽग्निपूतो भवति, सुरापानात्पूतो भवति,
ब्रह्महत्यात्पूतो भवति, तस्मादविमुक्तमाश्रितो 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 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 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.

लोकानाह्वय सर्वान् डमरुकनिन्दैः घोरसंसारमग्नान्
दत्वाभीतिं दयालुः प्रणतभयहरं कुञ्चितं वामपादम् ।
उद्धृत्येदं विमुक्तेरयनमिति करात् दर्शयन् प्रत्ययार्थं
विभ्रद्वह्निं स पायात् कलयति नटनं चित्सभायां शिवो यः ॥

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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