

**TOURISM AND FOLKLORE OF KANCHIPURAM -
DIVINITY NOURISHED BY NATURE AND SPIRITUALISM**

Dr. E. Sarala

Assistant Professor, Department of History and TTM
Ethiraj College for Women (A), Chennai

Key Concepts: *Ekambareswarar, Kamakshi, Kanchi, Temples,
Women's Rights, Women's Welfare, United Nations*

Kanchipuram has carved out for itself a unique place in art heritage of India. Attention is drawn on selected temples which are considered as landmark in history of temple architecture of South India. Effort has been made to cover temples from Sangam age to modern times with affiliation to various religions like Saivism, Vaishnavism, Buddhism and Jainism (Srinivasan 1971, 231).

KANCHI – THE PSEUDONYM

The name of the city has been called '*Kaanchi*' as well as '*kanchchi*' from a very old time (Manimegalai, 174, 28). Pathanjali mentions this city in his '*Maha Bashya* written in the 2nd Century B.C. as Kanchi was a more beautiful and praise worthy city even before the Christian era. Such was its' splendour that the Sangam poet *Kadiyallur Uruthiran Kannanar* compared the beauty of this fortified city to the lotus that sprouted from the navel of Vishnu giving birth to the four faced Brahma. This victorious ancient city celebrated many festivals in adoration to the Gods, just like the bird making noise around the praiseworthy jack fruit tree rather than the other trees yielding fruits without flowering (Perumpanatruppadai, 402-11). The poet *Kannanar* refers to Thiru Yadokthakari Swami temple at Thiruvekka at the outskirts of Kanchi (Perumpanatruppadai, 402-11) and this infers that the name of the city Kanchi is derived from the abundance of the kanthal trees (botanical name).

The great Sanskrit Poet Kalidasa gives a glorious tribute of praise to this city as *Jaati Naaryeshu Rambha, Nadheeshu Ganga, Nagareshu kanchi*. Among the flowers jasmine, among the ladies Rambha, among the rivers Ganga, and among the cities Kanchi are famous. Even in the Sangam period, Kanchi has been noted as the destination for countless festivals of various temples. The plan of the city was made with the streets, on which run the festival cars of Ekambaranathar temple without disturbing the Streets where the festival cars of the Kamatchiamman temple pass through, is striking.

SALIENT FEATURES OF KANCHI

Kanchi could be considered the greatest among the holy places and of all the temples, Ekambareswarar temple has been considered as the best as the tradition says that while Kasi could afford *mukti* i.e., salvation, to only those who die there, Kanchi even by thought could take one to the lotus feet of Lord Siva. Periya Puranam popularly known as the *Thiruttondar Puranam* (the Purana of the holy devotees) recorded the specialities of Kanchipuram in the following ways in its sacred testament.

- Ka means Brahma, anchi means worship, and puram means nagar (place) (Chari 1982, 57).

- This place has been worshipped by Brahma and hence called Kanchipuram (Mahalingam 1964, 4).
- A place attributed as the choice of Bhumadevi.
- When the oceans raised high during *pralayas* (destructions) the Goddess protected Kanchi without being destroyed. Skanda Puranam had paid rich attributes to this place.
- In lyrics, Kanchi has also been referred to as ‘Kanchchipathy’ and ‘Kanchchippedu’.
- The city of Kanchipuram has been called by several other names such as: Kachchi, Kachiyampadhi, Kanchi, Ekambam, Kanchiampadhi, Bhulok Kailas, Sivapuram, Thundeerapuram and Sathyavartastalam (Shankaranarayana Rao 2005, 3).
- This city is described as one of the seven places which will lead to *mukti* or salvation.
- Of the Pancha Bhutas (the five elements), it is pronounced as Pirthvi, where the principal Linga (element of Siva) is of the nature of sand.
- Kanchipuram is one of the Sakthi Peetha (seat of the divine power) of India.
- All the seven Thirumurais (scriptures of Tamil Vedas) has been sung in praise of Kanchi.
- It has the three exceptional tributes such as Murthy, Sthalam (place), and theertham (sacred tank).
- It is well-known for several theerthas (sacred tanks namely (a) Sarva theertham (b) Mangala theertham (c) Sivagangai theertham (d) Kambai theertham and (e) Ulakani theertham.
- There are 108 Siva temples (Gopalakrishnan 2000, 1702) and 18 Vishnu temples, so the holy city is considered as the Temples of Gods.
- Tradition holds that the famous temple of Ekambar restored Sundaramurthy Swamigal’s left eye and blessed him.
- It is believed that 2 of the Saivite Saints Sri Thirukurippu Thonda Nayanar and Sri Sakkiya Nayanar attained *mukti* (salvation) in Kanchi and to commemorate this, the “Muktheeswaram’ temple was constructed.
- Kanchi puranam and Skanda puranam speaks about the speciality of this place.
- It has the unique honour of possessing institutions, such as Mavadi, Murukkadi and Arasadi.
- This place has the greatness and single honour in the pivot of all the living beings namely Kamakoti Ammai, who ruled this city and demonstrated the possible growth and administration of all the 32 kinds of dharmas (virtues).
- In the Maha Patiyam of the Pathanjali Muni, the greatness of Kanchi has been indicated.
- Lyrics such as Perumpanatruppadai and Manimekalai expound the greatness of Kanchi.
- Great savants like Chanakya of Artha Sastra, Parimealazhakar who interpreted Thirukkural, Kacchiyappa Sivachariyar who contributed Skanda puranam, Vedantha Desikar – an exponent of Vaishnava Siddantha and Syama Sastri – the well known exponent of music hailed from this place (Banuchari 131-33).

TOURISM POTENTIALS OF KANCHIPURAM

The pilgrim city Kanchi is a place of temples of various magnitudes. This Prithviksethra (one of five elements of nature for Earth due to the existence of the

Ekambareswara temple) and Sakti peetham (Kamakshi amman seat of power) concentrated in this holy land wards off all evils and bestows kind blessings on the devotees. The Saint Philosophers right from Adi Shankara to Sri Chandra Sekharendra Sarasvati Swami and Sri Jayendra Sarawathi Swami disseminated Vedic education to millions of people through the komakoti peetham which is situated at Kanchi. Literary Evidences quotes exhaustive references about the activities of Kanchipuram. The eminent scholars made significant contributions in enriching the literary horizons of Kanchipuram in Prakrit, Sanskrit, Tamil and Manipravalam.

RELIGIOUS HARMONY

The origin and evolution of all the religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism and Vaishnavism with their sacred traditions and goals played an important role in shaping Kanchipuram as the greatest Spiritual centre.

KAMAKOTI PEETAM

Kamakoti peetam the hallowed monastery of Kanchipuram occupies a popular slot as the spiritual centre of excellence of India and it is widely believed that Adi Shankaracharya himself established the Kanchi Kamakotti Matha.

SILK PARADISE

Kanchipuram is not only the city of thousand temples but also the home of thousands of looms. The temple structure and thread art are intermingled in the marvellous Kanchipuram silk sarees woven with consummate skill by the weavers.

INTERACTION OF COMMUNITIES WITH THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

In the process of gradual growth and development over the years, Kanchipuram has become one of the most popular and famous pilgrim centres for the Hindus. Development of communication and transportation network with most parts of the country has been one of the main attributes for its growth and development as a famous religious centre. Kanchipuram also has the distinction of having some of the excellent temples of the country like Ekambaranathar, Kailasanathar, Varadaraja Perumal apart from the Kamakshi Amman temple. These temples offer spiritual solace through participation in festivals and these pilgrimages energises devotees with spiritual strength and moral valour.

FESTIVALS IN KANCHI

The main purpose of festivals celebrated in Kanchipuram is to explain the basic elements of the Hindu rituals as these festivals constitute a bundle of religious practices. Besides the benefits which are purely religious, they also imbibe the feeling of oneness in the groups enabling them to focus their individual energy towards a common social concern which is especially an important phenomenon of the Indian religion which is the predominant requirement for the households in general and the community in particular. Joint families and rural communities encourage these festivals for social, economic and spiritual solidarity. The Kamakshiamman temple being essentially a religious institution and a centre of social interaction, it attaches great significance to festivals because the festivals attract more crowds than the daily worship.

There are also certain other festivals which are common to all the Vishnu and the Siva temples. Generic and non-generic festivals are also celebrated at Kanchipuram. As a co-ordination is ascertained between the Sthalapuram legends

and its influence on sculptures, rituals and festivals of the respective temples, the festivals celebrated here are varied by the nature of the temples. However, *agamas* i.e., the religious treatises differs in their explanation about the rituals that are celebrated in the Saivite and Vaishnavite temples. Within the system, there is non-homogeneity of time and elements but the Hindu festivals celebrated here act as temporal makers by which the latent potentialities are actualized or controlled. Ritual activities on the socio-cultural plane conducted at the city of Kanchipuram manifests the Hindu conceptions of human and cosmic values in an ideological plane.

NATURE OF FESTIVALS

The term festival is popularly stylised as *Utsava* in Tamil. Utsava is said to denote the activity that serves as a “remover of misery” or as a “remover of obstacles” in one’s life as it takes away problems from the lives of the *Utsava* performers. Numerous royal grants recorded along with other private benefactors engraved here exquisitely describes the unequivocal importance attached to these festivals.

According to the agamic texts, there are three classes of Utsavas, all of which are performed at length. In the first place, there are the *Nitya* rites which are to be celebrated daily in a temple. They include Puja or Archana (worship), daily chantings to the temple deities, and regular rituals celebrated in observance of the new moon, on Ekaadasi and Dvaadasi days and on certain days when auspicious stars are on ascendance in each month.

Also, a review of the various festivals taking place in course of each year in the temples of Kanchipuram is also quite interesting. From inscriptional or literary references pertaining to these temples, we find that many of these festivals have been found to be going on for several centuries. In the past, they seem to have been done on a smaller scale. However, the festivals and celebrations increased in number and grandeur as the years rolled on.

The names of the festivals celebrated here are quite unique as the dates of these festivals are named after the name of the month, the fortnight (Shukla paksha the first fortnight between the New Moon Day and the Full Moon Day i.e., the period of the brightening moon or Krishna paksha – the second fortnight i.e., the period of the waning moon) and the number of the thithi. For example, Shayanotsava, the festivals of the sleeping (Vishnu), is celebrated on Ashadha (month), Shukla (fortnight), and Ekadashi (the 11th thithi). Easily reckoned is a festival when it falls on a new or full moon of any given month, Amavasya or Poornima alone are sufficient indicators. The Karthikai deepam occurs on Krithika (poornima) (Sri Kamakshi Ambal Sthala Varalaru n.d, 17).

KAMAKSHI AMMAN TEMPLE

Yet another feature about Kanchi is that there is no sanctum for the Devi or mother Goddess in the Siva temples within the limits of the city of Kanchi whereas there is a separate sanctum for Devi in every Saivite temples of Tamil Nadu. It is because of this Manmatha who was made formless by Lord Siva performed penance, in order to recover form at Kanchi invoking Goddess Kamakshi. Pleased with his penance, Kamakshi gave him a new form by her gracious look. He then prayed that he should be empowered to conquer Siva. Granting his prayer, Kamakshi withdrew her into herself from all the Siva temples including Kailasa and concentrated all of it in the space of a small cave in the Kamakostha (Das 1906, 224). Hence, the temple of

Kamakshi is the centre of enormous importance in Kanchi. There are many temples in this sacred city dedicated to Vishnu and Siva. It is the custom in Kanchipuram temples to take the Lord in procession at the time of Brahmotsava through the main streets around the temple of Kamakshi. All the temples whether Saivite or Vaisnavite have their main gopurams or entrances facing towards Kamakostha.



It is believed that Lord Brahma went to Kailasa, the abode of Lord Siva to worship him. After worshipping him, he went to pray his consort Devi and as Devi was not found to there, Lord Brahma went in search to all the Siva temples and he could not find her in any of them. Realising that all this was due to the will of Kamakshiamman, he performed penance in the Kamakostha at Kanchi praying to her that *sannidhya* or presence and proximity of Kamakshiammn should be manifested in all the temples as it earlier existed. Kamakshi appeared before him and in response to his prayer agreed to restore her *sannidhya* in all the Siva temples excepting in those that are located in Kanchi and further stated that there is no need for a separate sanctum for her in any of the Siva temples at Kanchipuram as it is the Sivakshetra and ofcourse thereafter Kamakshi restored her sannidhya in all the Siva temples except Kanchi (The Golden Temple of Arulmigu Ekambaranathar 1989, 12-13).

EKAMBARANATHAR TEMPLE

In an inscription in the northern side of Sri eva Nayagar shrine in Ekambareswarar temple it is stated, 'For the benevolence of Nagama Naickar, brother of Sreerama Naickar, son of Tippu Naickar of this city, they gave twenty four pon (gold coins) to Ekambaranathar to meet the expenses of the sixth day festivals. So for a very long time the residents of Kanchipuram have been contributing their

might for the expenses of Grand festival in the temple. The annual grand festival in a temple would be performed for fourteen days.



The festivals of the first ten days would be known as Bramaha Utsavam (grand festivals) and the remaining four days festivals are called Vidaiyathi Utsavams (festivals for relaxation of the god).

PANGUNI UTTHIRA THIRUKALYANA PERU VIZHA

The annual grand festival in the Ekambaranathar temple is known as *Panguni Utthira Thiru Kalyana Peruvizha* (Thirukoil Sthala Varalaru – Arulmigu Ekambaranathar Thirukoil n.d. 23-25) because the tenth day of the Utsavam or celebration is performed on the day of the star of Uthiram in the month of Panguni and during the night of that day, the marriage of Ekambaranathar with Elavar Kuzhali will be celebrated.

A unique feature of this marriage celebration is that during the same auspicious time, several people perform the marriages of their kith and kin within the compounds of the temple. This kind of social marriages cannot be found in any other temple. The Utsavamurthys (idols used for taking in procession) of Siva and Parvathi and other deities would be adorned with ornaments and flowers and carried on various kinds of Vahanas (carriers i.e., vehicles) in procession, with the music of Nathaswaram and other accompanying instruments, fireworks along with the singing of Tevaram in the Raja Veethys (streets) would take place during the grand festivals. The Brahma Utsavam generally commenced with the Utsavam of Vinayagar in the previous night of the first day of the 14 days Utsavam.

After the wedding, Elavar Kuzhali (Shankaranarayana Rao 2012. 44-45) has perceived Sakti in the left side of Lord Siva and has feigned dislike play with him. To remove her suffering from her feigned dislike with her husband, these festivals would be celebrated by the Vanniya kula Kshatriya Maha Sangam. The idols of Ekambaranathar and Elavar Kuzhali would be brought from the temple in the separate Vimanas, facing each other in posture of encounter, and kept at a distance. Sundaramurthy Nayanar would be the part of a mediator.

MUSICAL HERITAGE OF KANCHI

Music and religion are closely related to each other in Kanchipuram. The composers of music located in and around the city of Kanchipuram were all the devotees of God. Therefore it is no wonder that Kanchipuram, the city of temples, inspired the composers to sing in praise of the Gods and Goddesses enshrined in this divine destination. In fact, it was mainly the patronage extended by the rulers of Kanchipuram to art and architecture by constructing temples that sowed the seed for the growth of art and music in Kanchipuram. The Pallava Kings, for whom Kanchipuram was the capital city, laid the foundation for the development of all the arts by constructing temples for all faiths and making gifts of land for the performance of various rituals in which music played an important role.

The Cholas, who ruled from the 10th to the 13th centuries, and the Vijayanagar kings, who ruled from the 14th to the 17th centuries too followed their predecessors in this regard by appointing musicians and dancers in all the temples thus constructed. The dancers, called devadasis, who were proficient in music and dance, were appointed to sing and dance before the deity every day and to accompany the deity in processions. There were *nadaswaram* (double reed wind instrument) players in each temple (Nandita Krishna 2006, 116). Besides dancers and musicians, Oduvars (singers) were appointed in Shiva temples to sing Devaram hymns. Whereas, in the Vishnu temples, the reciters of the Divyaprabandham, are distinctively styled as Vinnappam Seivars, were appointed. Besides the appointed musicians, eminent musicians were also invited to perform during the festivals and almost all the composers who went on a pilgrimage to the sacred places include Kanchipuram in their itinerary and have also sung in praise of the Gods and Goddesses enshrined in the various temples at Kanchipuram.

THE FINDINGS

Temples of Kanchipuram contribute significantly to the cultural and economic development of the State. The festivals celebrated in Kanchipuram as per the rich agamic tradition have major impact on the development of heritage tourism leaving enormous benefits to the host communities as the performing of festivals and events celebrated in Kanchipuram are not specifically designed to address the needs for any one particular group. The economic opportunities in addition to social and cultural benefits are making the local community to play a vital role in the development of tourism through festivals. Festivals attract the tourists to local community events to promote cultural exchanges between the tourists and the residents making today's Kanchipuram as a cultural centre of centuries that interests whether a devotee or a sociologist and even a historian alike.

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