

Vinaa Venkatesham Nanaatho Nanaathah

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Abstract

After a brief glimpse into the ‘mysteries’ and legends associated with the deity of Tirumala, this article focuses on Venkateshwara, the Lord of this sacred site, understanding Him to be the Kali Yuga Varada, or the source of solace and salvation in the present era of Kali. Looking further, one finds within the deity, aspects of the six major deities of the Shanmata tradition, as well as the Guru. This is visualized through the concept of Spiritual Altitude, depicted as the ‘spiritual hill’ of Govindaadri. This leads to the Lord being called as “Eka-Moorthy”, containing all divinity within Himself. As an extension to that thought, the article then discusses on the 108 sacred sites of Shanmata, called the Kshetra-Ashtottara, and how one can, merely contemplating upon Venkateshwara, perform a virtual ‘Kshetraadanam’ to these sites. This visualization is termed “Eka Kshetra-Ashtottara Moorthy” (EKAM). Reconciling this concept with Govindaadri using the Panchaayatana concept leads to yet another visualization, termed “Pancha-EKAM”.

In summary, this article elaborates upon a series of inquiries, thoughts and revelations to the author, regarding the nature of the Lord Venkateshwara, in various levels of Spiritual Altitudes, which are essentially measures of Spiritual Inclusivity. The most important observation and value-add from these discussions is that Tirumala of Venkateshwara is indeed the most sacred Kshetra of Baalaa Tripurasundari, who is the very special form of the Universal Mother Ambika, manifest with the core intention of “Kali Yuga Varadha”. By thus contemplating upon Venkateshwara as Baalaa, Tirumala, as Govindaadri becomes the transition point from the physical level, represented by various Kshetras, to the highest spiritual level, represented by the Sri Yantra, which is the ultimate representation of the universe, leading to the supreme Sat Chit Aananda Parabrahman in the form of the Universal Mother Ambika.

Introduction

Anybody even with a slight understanding of India and its spirituality immediately understands the importance and significance of Tirumala, as the temple of Lord Venkateshwara, also known as Venkatesha and Srinivasa, and worshipped as a manifestation of the God Vishnu. This temple is the single busiest Kshetra (sacred site) in India, witnessing more inflow than Mecca or the Vatican City.

But questions of “Who is Venkateshwara? Which Deity is this?” have caused rife debates among staunch devotees of different denominations for many centuries now. Apparently, the bases for these debates are certain ‘mysteries’ in the idol and legends associated with the deity of Tirumala. Some

relevant points, all of them sourced from blogs on the world wide web, are mentioned below:

1. Sri Venkatesha has been worshipped by Jains worshipped as Aadimuleshwara, Vaishnavas as Srinivasa, Shaivas as Hari-Shankara and Shaktas as Sri Bala Tripurasundari. There are enough reasons to associate this Moorthy with Shiva, Shakti, Vishnu and Subrahmanya.
2. In some of the older hmyns of Azhwars, the Lord is said to have worn Chakra and Parashu, signifying Hari-Hara-Sama Aikya Murti. But after the advent of Ramanuja Acharya, this practice was severely discouraged. It is said that the original deity at Venkatachala did not sport Shankha or Chakra or even the SriVaishnava Tilaka we see today. After a series of conflicts between Shaivite and Vaishnavite assemblies in Kalahasti and Tirupati, Ramanuja decided to solve the disputes by placing the weapons of both Hari and Hara on the Lord, and after leaving them undisturbed overnight, observed that the next morning, the Shankha and Chakra stayed as is whereas the other weapons dropped down.
3. The Moola mantra of Venkatesha is of nine and eight letters, both of which refer to Venkatesha and not Srinivasa. Traditional Vaishnavaites have always preferred to use Srinivasa and not Venkateshwara as the word 'Eesha', though meaning 'Lord' in general terms, was always seen with suspicion as only referring to Lord Shiva.
4. It is a practice to worship Srinivasa with Bilwa during Dhanur Maasa. Bilwa is very sacred for Shiva Archana and traditional Vaishnavas stay away from Bilwa, though it is recorded as sacred for the worship of Mahalakshmi as well.
5. The idol of Srinivasa has a JatA - matted hair, which is a Lakshana of Shiva.
6. On Shivaratri day, all archakas of the temple visit Kshetrapala and Abhisheka is performed according to Shaivaagama. Though Srivaishnavaite scholars claim this to be non-traditional, this practice is still in vogue.
7. On Vinayaka Chaturthi, Modakas are offered to Lord, suggesting his Svaroopas as Lord Mahaganapati.
8. Shiva Rahasya, an Itihasa, describes Venkatadri as the abode of Lord Subrahmanya in his form as a VaTu, without a consort. It is described that the famous Teertha - swAmi puShkariNi - is named after swAminAtha or kumAra swAmi. This is also indicated by the Sahasranama of Venkateshwara which has the nama: swamidhyeyaya namaH, one who is meditated upon by Kumaraswami. According to some legends, Vishnu and Subrahmanya worshipped Dakshinamurti in the hill of Venkatam and attained oneness with each other and the Lord. Another name, kartikeyavapushe namaH is suggestive of the same.
9. Also, from the story of Venkateshwara, one can see an episode where he emerges from an anthill, suggesting his oneness with Subrahmanya. It is very common to find names such as Venkatasubbayya or Venkatasubrahmanyam in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, indicating this forgotten aspect. Also, one should carefully understand the Muthuswami Dikshitar Krti - subrahmaNyena rakShitoham - in Suddha Dhanyasi: venkateshwara namarUpeNa, vichitra vishAkhA mahotsavena.
10. The Venkatesha Sahasranama goes like this: venatesho virUpAkSho vishwesho vishwabavanaH, the very second name indicating his Shiva Svaroopas. Every hymn, in the first verse, conveys the gist of the entire hymn by indicating the central focus of the hymn, the path or the philosophy adopted to elaborate on the chosen subject etc. The first verse has no mention of any of the popular epithets of Vishnu at all. Exactly 500 names apply to Shiva in this Sahasranama and 500

to Vishnu.

11. The feet of the idol are underground, which is a necessity for all Shiva murtis according to kAmikAgama.
12. Lord has Simha Niketanam [emblem is a couchant lion] which is peculiar to forms of Sridevi everywhere.
13. The special annual festival of the Lord is performed during Sharad Navaraatri, special to Sri Lalita.
14. Swami is bathed in Manjal or turmeric every friday, which is generally a prescribed practice for Amba [Durvasa Samhita, 29-6].
15. To this day, auttareyas worship Lord as Balaji - non-different from Sri Bala Tripurasundari, and it is believed that the prosperity of this shrine is due to a Sri Chakra established by Adi Shankara somewhere on this hill.
16. Lord's waist is very slender which, according to Saamudrika Shaastra, is characteristic of Ambika.
17. Lord's hair is very long, reaching the knee, again characteristic of Ambika.
18. The Idol of Balaji is adorned with 'Pachai Karpooram', from Cinnamomum camphora, which is a highly volatile substance, daily. If applied to a stone, it will form Cracks, but not so in Lord Balaji's case.
19. There is no mark of the Chisel in the Idol.
20. The Idol is always at 110 Degree Fahrenheit, despite being bathed in Water, Milk at the early hours, 4.30AM. After bathing the Deity Sweat forms every day and it is wiped off.
21. AmbAL Amsa are seen on Lord VenkateshvarA's image, in the Simha LalATam, Yoga MudrA, Bhoga MudrA, Varada MudrA, Kattiya Vilambita MudrA, the meTTi, kolusu, taNDai (toe-rings and anklet) on the feet. All these are the marks of Sri AlarmElu Mangai. The Kattiya Vilambita Hastam belongs only to AmbAL, not to VishNu, and can be seen on the images of ThiruvudaiMarudur Mookambika, Kanyakumari Bhagavati Amman, Tiruvaiyaru Dharmasamvardini, and Mayiladuturai Abhayambikai.
22. After having the darshan of the Lord, the devotees deposit their offerings to the Lord in this Hundi. The temple complex was modified many times for creating easy passage to the devotees. But the hundi was never shifted from this place as it is believed that "Sri Chakra Yantra" (the holy Yantra of the Universal Mother) lies underneath the main hundi.

References:

<http://www.kamakotimandali.com/misc/venkatesha.html>,

<http://www.tirumala.org/TTDTempleHistory.aspx>

<https://ramanan50.wordpress.com/2014/02/22/rare-information-tirupati-lord-balaji/>.



Figure 1 Lord Venkateswara

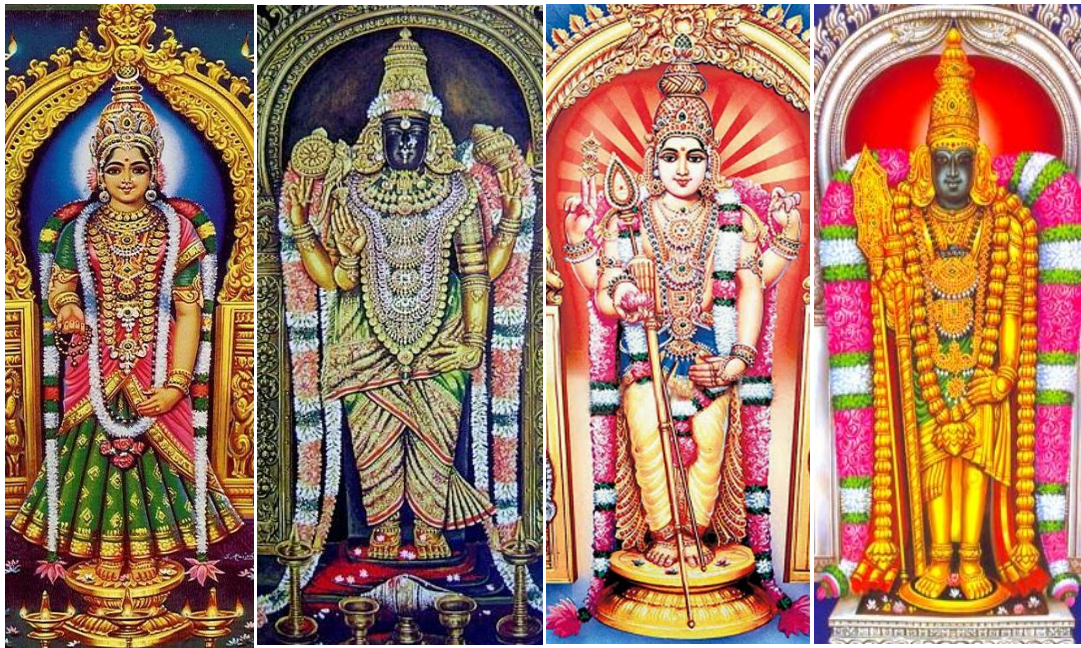


Figure 2 The Katya Vilambita posture visible in the left hands of Goddess Kanyakumari, Abhayambika of Mayiladuthurai and Murugan in Thiruchendur and Swamimalai

Having this list of observations and points in mind, the author presents below, his view on the issue:

Contrary to almost all Vishnu Kshetras (and even most Shiva Kshetras), Tirumala is not associated as a Kshetra of destruction, prologue or epilogue of any Asura Samhara/Good over Evil incidents, where the Lord answers prayers of devotees, or kills demons or grants refuge to devotees.

The Sthala Purana says Vishnu, as Srinivasa, came here directly from Vaikunta in search of Lakshmi and meditated here, and won Padmavathi's hand in marriage. This also correlates with the extremely ancient pre-Cambrian geology, as seen in the unique structure of Shilaa Thoranam and out-of-the-world species of flora and fauna one finds here.

Reference: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eparchaean_Unconformity



Figure 3 The Shila Thoranam rock formation in Thirumala; Lord's face in Tirumala hills

So what exactly happened when Lakshmi, feeling insulted at Bhṛigu kicking Her abode at Vishnu's chest, left Vaikunta? And what is the intent of this Kshetra?

The intent is to provide the most easily accessible Moorthy/Kshetra in the Kali Yuga, where the common man can worship and his sins (Vem) will be destroyed (Kata). This is why Venkateshwara is praised as the Kali Yuga Varadha.

Who is the Kali Yuga Varadha? Two deities are usually referred to by this epithet:

1. Hanuman: However, He protects us, not as a deity, but as a Chiranjeevi, living with and among us, even to this day.

2. Subrahmanya: Though He is praised as Kali Yuga Varadha, Subrahmanya is not included in the Panchayatana Puja, but as the sixth in Shanmata. He is seen as the Adho Mukha of Shiva, beyond the latter's usual five faces, and as Shiva-Shakti Aikya in the form of Somaskanda.

Reference: <http://www.karnatik.com/c1796.shtml>

So, this option takes us to the Mother Goddess, since She is praised as "Shiva Shakti Aikya Svaroopini" in Lalitha Sahasranama 999th Nama. Which form of the Mother is this?

In the Baalaa Panchaangam of Bala Tripurasundari, it is said "In the Kali Yuga there is no other Vidya resembling this Bala Tripurasundari Vidya. It is said that Shri Bala Tripura gives siddhi quickly." So, the Mother Goddess, as Bala Tripurasundari, the Kali Yuga Varadhaa chose to manifest Herself, in the form of Venkateshwara. Hence, the name Balaji seems appropriate. One can still see the long hair of the Moorthy.



Figure 4 Goddess Baalaa Tripurasundari

Reference: <http://www.shivashakti.com/bala.htm>

But, it seems the Mother also knows that the Kali Yuga is an age of ignorance and intellectually degraded quarrels. So, She had to assume a very unique form. She chose a form, Venkateshwara, combining the attributes of all the three main deities worshipped in the Kali Yuga – Shiva, Shakti and Vishnu, since all other deities can be derived from these.

In accordance with that, the very Pratyaksha form of the Moorthy, is the Devi Herself, whereas Shiva and Vishnu are represented as either halves of the deity, carrying the respective weapons of Parashu and Chakra. This Moorthy was seen as a Hari-Hara form, and in accordance with that, the Venkatesha Sahasranama contains 500 names of Hari and 500 of Hara.

However, as time passed, somehow the Hara aspect resonated more, and the name Venkateshwara, having "Ishvara" or Shiva epithet, stuck as the primary appellation of the Moorthy. Quarrels were imminent. Clearly the Hari-Hara-Shakti equivalence that the Mother intended was being thrown in jeopardy. A divine Leela was in order to restore this.

And then came, Ramanuja Acharya. He settled this dispute, by placing weapons of Hari (Shankha,Chakra) and Hara (Parashu, Trishula) in front of the Moorthy and observed which of those the Lord chose. The result: Shankha and Chakra. The prayers and procedures put forth by Acharya are followed even today.

But, how did this restore the balance? Today, we see Balaji, the Devi in the deity's Pratyaksha Roopa, with the long hair, Metti and Golusu, Devi Mudras, Simha Niketana and turmeric baths every Friday. We see Vishnu, as Srinivasa, in the deity's Roopa with the Tilaka Naama, Shankha, Chakra and Garuda, and as one of the eight most important Svayam Vyakta Narayana Kshetras. We see Shiva, as Venkatesha, in the deity's Keerthi, adept in destroying the sins, since destruction of anything, even sin, is Shiva's forte. This is why Tirumala is the Eka-Moorthy Kshetra: no other deity, because no other deity is necessary. And above all, Venkateshwara, as the intent, is the Parabrahman's form as the Kali Yuga Varadha: the most easily accessible deity, and as the environment testifies, the true paradise on earth.

Spiritual Altitude and Govindaadri

For the spiritually avid person, the Indian Subcontinent, as the Eka-Desha is a very homely place – because of its vast array of Temples, Teerthas and Kshetras, all of them immensely powerful and reverberating with spiritual energy, with rich history and legacy. Going one step further is the Eka-Kshetra of Kashi, where every temple, every form of the divine imaginable, finds a place. From Nepali Pashupatinath temples to temples of Tamil and Telugu origin, one can find just about anything in that eternal city of Varanasi, purified every second by the Ganga.

Going one step even further, we transit from Eka-Desha, to Eka-Kshetra, to the Eka-Moorthy: the Lord Venkateshwara of Tirupati. Every Kshetra one finds in Bharatavarsha can be found in Kashi. Every Deity one finds in Kashi can be found in Venkateshwara. He is the Nija Swarooma of that Vishwarooma Arjuna was privileged to experience thousands of years ago.

As the Kali Yuga Varadha, He is the designated Deity, the only solace for one and all, and it is imperative to forever immerse in constant thought of the Lord who destroys sins (Venkateshwara). This applies to one and all, irrespective of caste, gender, age, orientation, mindset or philosophy.

In accordance with the Eka-Moorthy principle, and as an aid to visualize the various deities in Venkateshwara, the author proposes a framework titled Govindaadri, and elaborated as below. It is interesting to note that apart from the Guru, the six deities visualized here, namely Ganapathi, Shiva, Shakti, Vishnu, Aditya and Subrahmanya, correspond to the Shanmata, a tradition established by Shankara, of visualizing the Absolute Parabrahman as the six popular deities.

Concept of Spiritual Altitude

Let us start with a basic thought. Suppose I have a conversation with a person X who is not very well-versed with geography. I tell X: Everest is in Nepal, which is a country, and Kathmandu is also in Nepal. Though X now knows two places in Nepal, this information is neither significant nor complete.

If X was a little more knowledgeable in geography, X would understand that Everest is a mountain, at 8000+ metres above sea level, and Kathmandu, Nepal's capital, is a valley. So, the factor that enables

complete understanding of this geography is not just the location, but also altitude.

Similarly, when one asks questions like, “Is Tirumala a Shaiva or Vaishnava Kshetra?”, neither the question nor the answer is complete without mentioning at what ‘spiritual altitude’ one looks at the deity from. This spiritual altitude refers to the level of spiritual advancement one has, which radically changes the perspective.

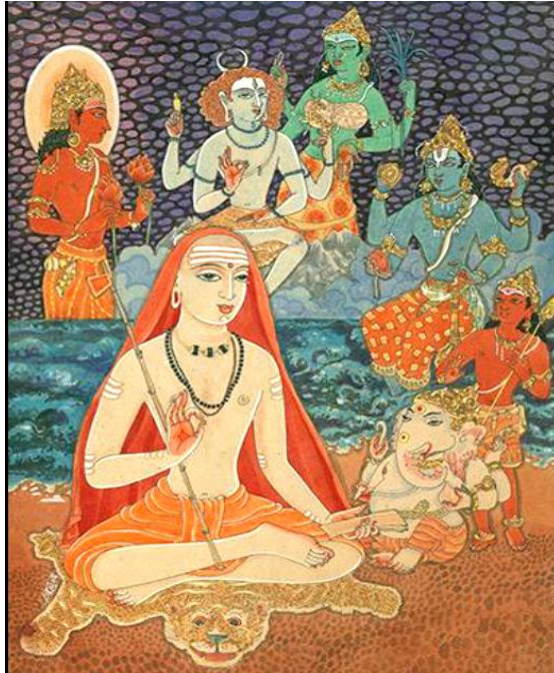


Figure 5 Aadi Shankara and the deities of the Shanmata

Govindaadri – The Concept

We know that ever since Sri Ramanuja Acharya resolved the conflict and controversies at Tirumala, the Lord willfully demonstrated to the common people and proved conclusively that He is a form of Vishnu. However, the very fact that there was ambiguity in the first place and that this ambiguity had to be cleared through Ramanuja, is the Lord’s Leela. This means that there is much more in the Lord than what meets the eye and heart: those are the hidden aspects of the Lord.

The conclusive proof of this fact is that there are still many mysteries about Tirumala that nobody has an answer for. These hidden aspects are revealed as one goes higher in spiritual altitude.

Thus, one has to undertake a spiritual journey through various altitudes – what I visualize as a spiritual hill termed “Govindaadri” – the eighth, invisible hill of Tirumala. There are seven stops in this Govindaadri trek, including the main shrine of Tirumala, and there are some spiritual ‘train services’ through this hill. Let us go through them:

1. Ganapathi as Pranava:

Every prayer, every function, every festival done in Hindu custom, invariable starts with the Mantra “Om Shuklaambaradharam Vishnum Sarva Vighna Upa Shaantayeh”. Whatever be its interpretation,

this Mantra unites the “Vishnu” – the One present ‘in and as’ everything in the universe, with the “Vighneshwara” – the One adept in removing all obstacles. There are two connections: Venkateshwara is the One without a second and so is called “Vinaayaka” here. Secondly, both Vighneshwara and Venkateshwara are Pranava Swaroopas – the very form of Om. Merely reaching this place, one can feel the constant and continuous reverberation of the Omkara: as sound, as light, as thought, as radiation, as matter, as energy. All one needs to feel and experience this energy is merely to be receptive and stay alive. This is the place where one sees the Omkara radiating out of Venkateshwara as grace, as blessings and as divine spiritual energy. No other formalities or effort required here.



Figure 6 A Depiction of Ganapathi as the Pranava Swaroopa

2. Guru as Sai:

The next step, where some great soul, whether alive in flesh and blood or not, guides you towards spiritual progress. Without crossing this stop, nobody can progress any further, as Tyagaraja sings in “Guruleka Etuvanti Guniki Teliyagabodu?”. There is absolutely no school of thought in Hinduism that fails to recognize the importance of a Guru. Without a Guru’s grace, it is simply impossible for any spiritual advancement at all. There have been many cases of great souls, where, due to a lack of a Guru, the Lord Himself assumed the form of a Guru. But the greatest Guru the world has ever seen is Lord Krishna Himself, the Jagadguru, who graced the world with the Bhagavad Geeta. Venkateshwara is worshipped as that very form of the Lord. It is in this context that the mesmerizing song “Kurai Ondrum Illai” addresses the Lord as Kannan and Venkateshan interchangeably. Without stopping at this level, even a visit to Tirumala can only be a mere Darshan of the Lord through the eyes, hearts and mind. It is only through a Guru that one can proceed to levels higher than Tirumala in Govindaadri. Arguably, in the present scenario, there has been no Guru more powerful and more compassionate than the Sai Baba of Shirdi. Only experiences, rather than words can capture the extent of His glory and miracles. He is a manifestation as the Hari-Hara-Brahma Swaroopa, as in the famous Shloka “Guru Brahma Guru Vishnu...”. Pilgrims visiting Tirupathi and Shirdi can easily capture and correlate the similarities of their powerful experiences and miracles, testifying to the Oneness between Guru and God.



Figure 7 Guru Sai Baba as a manifestation of Dattatreya, combining the aspects of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma

3. Vishnu as Srinivaasa:

When there were disputes concerning the identity of the Lord of Thirumala, Ramanuja settled it by conclusively proving that the Lord is indeed of the form of Narayana. Thus, whatever be the origins, the form of Narayana as Srinivasa, with Lakshmi dwelling in His chest, and with the Shankha-Chakra, is the precise form wilfully chosen by Venkateshwara. This is the very form of the Lord that one sees in Tirumala, and also in countless photos and paintings of the Lord, and the one by which the Lord showers His grace on one and all, irrespective of spiritual advancement, just as the sun shines on one and all without any distinction. Fractions of a second are enough for the Lord in this form to shower His grace. He even performs miracles through photos and paintings. He keeps pulling devotees towards Him in thousands every single day. All ‘train services’ in Govindaadri will have to compulsorily stop in this and the two previous stops.

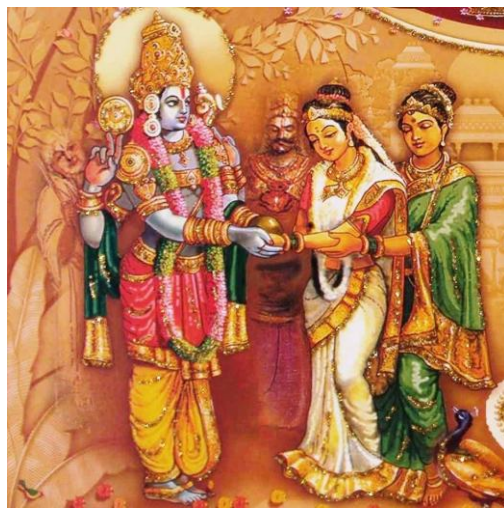


Figure 8 Lord Srinivasa, in marriage with Padmavathi

4. Subrahmanya as Skanda:

In this stop, one sees Venkateshwara beyond the Shankha, Chakra, Srivatsa and Vaishnava identity that He wilfully chose. Thus, at this level, Venkateshwara remains a male God, standing on a Hill. “Kundrathile Kumaranukku Kondaattam” – as this saying goes, on top of literally each and every hill and hillock, one finds Lord Subrahmanya. Of the five types of landscapes, He as Malaiyappa is the God of Hills or “Kurinji”. He is thus, the Subrahmanya. In this level, He represents the union of Shiva-Shakti or Purusha-Prakriti aspects, and one can see this in His three eyes representing sun, moon and fire, or Shiva, Shakti and Subrahmanya. Thus He is the representation of Somaskanda. We can also see Subrahmanya through His Varada and Katya Vilambita Hastas (hand postures).



Figure 9 The form of Somaskanda with Skanda in between Shiva and Shakti

5. Aaditya as SooryaNaaraayana:

In this stop, one sees the Lord beyond His physical form and His Hasta Mudras. What one sees here are seven resplendent Chakras and Kundalini energy passing through those. These are the same Chakras and energy present in each one of us and gets activated upon spiritual advancement. Each Chakra is one colour of the rainbow, representing each one of the seven horses drawing the Sun’s chariot swiftly across the sky. These are precisely the Sapta Chakras and the Sapta Swaras. This is how One meditates upon the Sun, glorified in the Gayatri Mantra as Savitr, as the very form of Om, as the Hari-Hara-Virinchaadi Roopa. To help contemplate on this aspect, one can see among Venkateshwara’s ornaments, five pendants denoting five Chakras as follows: pendant at sacral position near left hand little finger denoting Muladhara, pendant at sacral position near right hand fingers denoting Svadishtana, pendant at solar plexus near right hand palm denoting Manipoora, pendant of Sri Lakshmi in chest denoting Anahata, and pendant just below neck region denoting Visuddhi. The Thiru-Naamam denotes Ajna Chakra. The resplendent jewel in the Lord’s crown denotes the Sahasrara Chakra. At the end, the Kundalini crosses the third eye Chakra at Ajna and reaches the Sahasrara. This Crown Chakra is the final destination (Ayana) of all mankind (Nara): this is why the Lord is called Naaraayana.

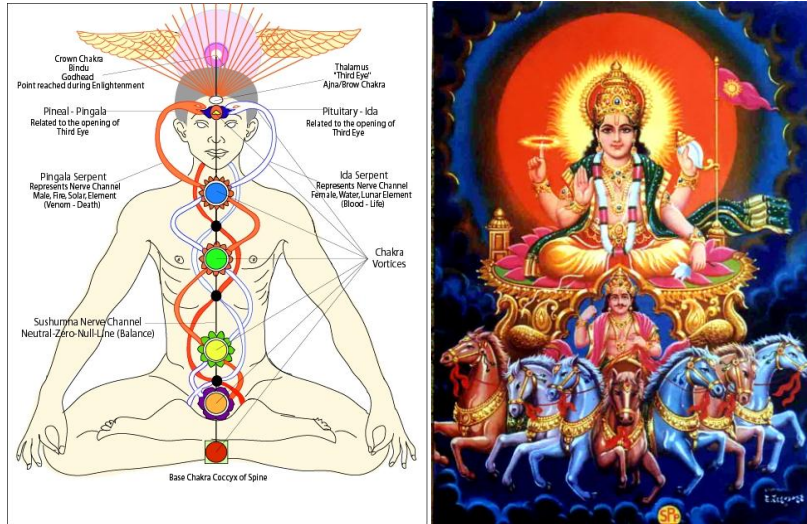


Figure 10 The 7 Kundalini Chakras and 7 Horses of Surya's Chariot

6. Shiva as Arunaachaleshwara:

With the emphasis on the “Eeshwara” part of Venkateshwara, at this stop, one sees the Lord here without even the Kundalini Chakras. When you remove the seven Chakras, what happens? All distinction and flavours of the spiritual energy (as Prakriti) vanish, and what is left, is a tall pillar reverberating with the pure energy of consciousness, unblemished. This is the pillar of fire one sees as Arunachala Lingam. This is the pure Prakasha, as Shiva, who has absorbed into Himself, all forms and attributes. Thus, one sees Venkatesha as a tall Lingam of Shiva (Eesha), who destroys (Kata) all the sins (Vem). This is the aspect of “Concept”.



Figure 11 The legend of Arunachaleshwara

7. Guhya Ambika:

In this, the last and highest stop of Govindaadri, one sees the Lord even beyond existence. At this point, the Lord is seen transcending space, time and existence: He is neither existent nor non-existent and inconceivable to human mind and thought. He is the Universal Divine Mother, Ambika, from where everything emerges and to where everything merges. Since this is the most subtle aspect and the highest stop, He is called “Guhya” – the hidden. When one reaches this stop, one realizes that everything in the universe imaginable, whatever be its nature or form, if you keep stripping it of its attributes and features one after another, you will always finally reach this stop. There is no other equivalent to this point, and this is why Sri Vidya, the spiritual tradition celebrating the Mother through the Sri Yantra, is the closest one can get to the Nirguna Parabrahman.

This is why, while extolling the Mother in Lalitha Sahasranamam, starting with the first Naama Sri Maata, one finds appellations like Shiva(53), Nirguna (139), Sarveshwari (202), Brahmaroopa (265), Govinda Roopini (267), Rudra Roopa (269), Ambika (295), Gayatri (290), Tat (425), Maata (457), Sahasradala Padmasta (528), Atma Vidya (583), Srividya (585), Gurumoorthi (603), Atma (617), Guhya (624), Vishnu Roopini (893), Baalaa (965), Sri Chakra Raja Nilaya (996) and Shiva Shakti Aikya Roopini (999).



Figure 12 Goddess Shri Lalitha Maha Tripurasundari

Now, for the train services in Govindaadri, which is the very form of the Maha Meru. There are many passenger services that run between consecutive stations, all fuelled by “Guru-Krupa”, but the following are the special express services.

A: Govindaadri Express:

This is the main train of Govindaadri, which starts from Pranava and goes all the way to Guhya Ambika, taking the devotee through each stage of spiritual advancement, treating the devotee with various amazing perspectives of Lord Venkateswara at each station. This train service covers all the six main deities of the Shanmata, along with the seventh, the Guru. This train is fuelled by the “Eka-Moorthy Bhaava” and shows how Venkateshwara is the Eka-Moorthy, as the Single Moorthy manifest as all forms of divinity all over the world.

B: Harihara Express:

This train is a non-stop service between Srinivasa and Arunachala stations, and is fuelled by “Roopa-Keerthi Samaanam”. In ages past, atleast one school of thought believed that Venkateshwara was a Hari-Hara Swaroopa holding both the Chakra and Parashu. However, we won't be able to find that one out, and ever since the Lord wilfully chose a Vaishnava form, a past Hari-Hara Swaroopa wouldn't even have relevance. However, there is the Hari-Hara aspect of Venkateshwara, where the Roopa (form) of the God is that of Hari, whereas the Keerthi (action) of the Lord is of Hara form, as He is the Lord (Eeshwara) destroying (Kata) sins (Vem). This is the basis of the Harihara express, and this is why of the 1000 Names of the Venkatesha Sahasranama, 500 are of Hari, and 500 are of Hara.

C: Baalaa Express:

This is a very special train service, and runs at top speed, non-stop from the Srinivasa stop to the Guhya Ambika stop. The 965th Naama of the Lalitha Sahasranama is “Baalaa”, and it is well known that, Baalaa as the young Devi, is a very special aspect of the Universal Mother. It is the entry point of the Sri Vidya tradition, and according to the Baalaa Panchanga, the Vidya of Baalaa Tripurasundari is the most adept and matchless in the present Kali Yuga age, and is thus the Kali Yuga Varadha, an appellation also used to extol Venkateshwara. It is also interesting that Venkateshwara is also called Balaji, signifying that Baalaa and Balaji are the same deity, and the common theme “Kali Yuga Varadha” is the fuel running the Baalaa Express. The forms of the Baalaa Devi in Kanyakumari and Venkateshwara, with similarities in posture, Mudras and Katya Vilambita Hasta are clear evidence of this. Furthermore, there are many aspects of Venkateshwara, sharing similarities with Baalaa, as the Simha Niketana, slender waist, long hair and turmeric baths every Friday. Also, as per the Tirumala Devasthanam website, there is a Sri Chakra Yantra in the main shrine underneath the Hundi, possibly installed by Aadi Shankara. It is interesting that the other places with such Sri Chakra installations are Kanchipuram Kamakshi Temple, Madurai Meenakshi Temple, Thiruvanaikaval Akhilandeswari Temple, all of which are Sri Vidya Kshetras, and Mannargudi Rajagopala Swami temple, where the deity is worshipped as a manifestation of Gopalasundari, yet another equivalence between Krishna (Balaji) and Lalitha (Baalaa).

The importance of the Baalaa express is that it is a direct connection between two of the most powerful stations – the Srinivasa, powerfully showering grace on everybody without partiality, and the Guhya Ambika, whose full experience is accessible only to the highest of the spiritually advanced. And this runs with the most necessary fuel of “Kali Yuga Varadha”, bypassing all stations in between. This is the most special and most valued train service in Govindaadri, and the one who is able to see Baalaa Tripurasundari in the form of Venkateshwara is clearly among the most privileged, and is directly taken through the nine Avaranas of Sri Yantra, to reach the Divine Mother, and ultimately Parabrahman.

Tirumala as a Vaishnavite Divya Desham

To briefly sum up the concept of Govindaadri, when one looks at Tirumala from various spiritual altitudes, one finds that Venkatesha is more than just a Vishnu Swaroopa. In fact, in ascending order, one finds the deity to be Ganapathi, Guru, Vishnu, Subrahmanya, Soorya, Shiva and finally Ambika, known because of this reason as the Eka-Moorthy. With the basis as the intent of Kali Yuga Varadha, one finds the deity to be none other than Baalaa Tripurasundari, manifesting in all these different forms.

But, among these forms, the one of Vishnu is really special, since that is the form in which the deity appears to the uninitiated common man, and this is the form the deity willingly chose when Ramanuja Acharya put Venkatesha to test. This is the form that millions visiting Tirumala everyday see. We even see a good 200 names of the Venkatesha Sahasranama dedicated to the Vishnu Dashavataras. Why is this Vishnu form such a special aspect of Venkatesha? There are three reasons:

1. To complete the Eka-Moorthy concept: Even with the deity as Baalaa, or as Subrahmanya standing upon a hill, the Eka-Moorthy concept will not be complete without an aspect of Vishnu in Venkatesha. But why does this have to be a special aspect?

2. Vishnu is the Yuga Purusha. At each and every era and Yuga, He has manifested in different forms, saving the good and destroying the evil. He has infact marked the very progress of time in eras, by His Avataras. So also, in Kali Yuga, Vishnu has to manifest as the Kali Yuga Varada.

3. Vishnu is the most easily accessible to the common man. He appeared in Avataras in various stages of evolution, from Matsya, the lowly fish to Krishna, the supreme Jagadguru. He lived with and among us, as Rama and Krishna, sharing the pleasures and pains of human life. Hence, among all deities that can be the Kali Yuga Varada, He is the most easily accessible to the common man. In contrast, if Bala Tripurasundari appeared as Herself, one would need proper Sri Vidya initiation to comprehend the Kali Yuga Varada significance fully.



Figure 13 Venkateshwara, Vishnu and the Dashavataras

However, in due course of time, Vishnu who is the most special aspect of Venkateshwara, came to be seen exclusively as the only aspect of Venkatesha by some people, who have clearly not advanced to higher heights of Govindaadri.

For, the one who has read Lalitha Sahasranamam knows the Mother to be Govinda Roopini and Vishnu Roopini, as well as Baalaa. All forms of any deity eventually converge into the Mother, because that is why She is called the Mother.

The one who knows that Shankaranarayana is one of the 25 Maheshwara Moorthis, and is the deity enshrined in Shankarankovil or Harihara in Karnataka, knows that Venkateshwara is of course the Eeshvara, the fiery pillar of Arunachala.

The one who knows the simple truth that “Kundrathin mel Kumaranukku Kondaattam” immediately recognizes Venkatesha as Subrahmanya.

At this juncture, looking at the subtle and hidden aspects of Venkateshwara at higher heights of Govindaadri, one is reminded of the following lines from the song “Kurai Ondrum Illai” composed on the Lord of Tirumala:

“Thiraiyin pin nirkkindraai Kanna;

Unnai maraiyodhum Gnaaniyar mattume kaanbaar;

Endraalum Kurai Ondrum Enakillai Kanna”

Eka Kshetra-Ashtottara Moorthy (EKAM):

The Concept of Kshetra-Ashtottara

In primordial times, the dynamic union of Shiva and Shakti created the Pranava Om, which pervaded the entire universe. Even today, in the distant seas, breeze, as well as in utter silence, the receptive one can hear this chant constantly. But Om is more than just a sound wave. It is the primordial entity, and in due course gave rise to 51 modes of vibrations, called Aksharas.

These Aksharas are 51 functionalities or ‘modes’ by which the universe functions. Based on its use and situation, a stone for example can be viewed as a tool, an obstacle, a step, or as a weight-piece. These are its modes, and at any given time, the constitution of the 51 Aksharas in us, stone and surroundings determine which mode of the stone comes into prominence at that instant.

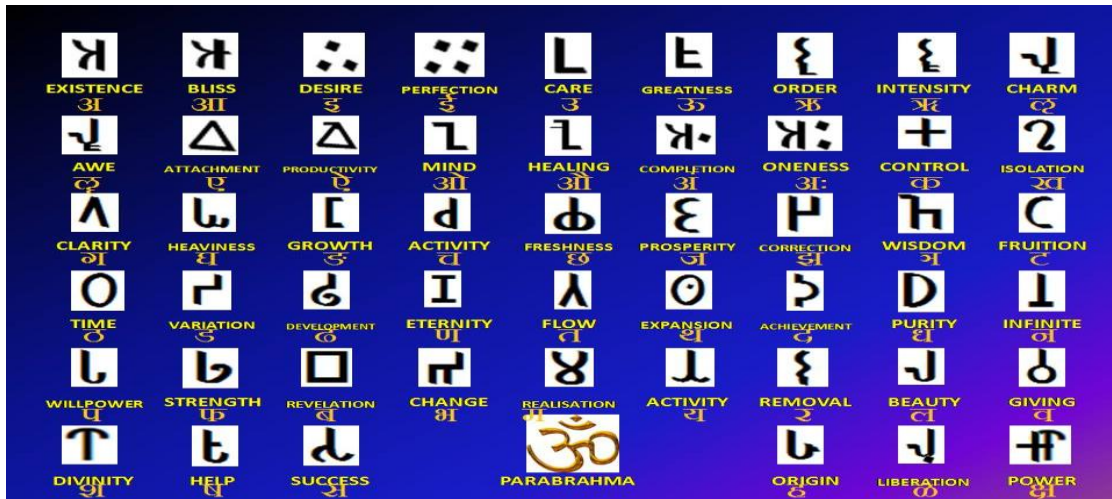


Figure 14 Concepts of the 51 Aksharas

There have been specific times, during when certain Aksharas have confluence and manifested in various places in the world, representing certain powerful aspects. We worship them as deities and forces. We bring these energies using incantations into temples, Pooja rooms, and in idols and statues, empowering them. We then absorb the divine energy they radiate by worshipping them. Places reverberating with such spiritual energy, most usually associated with important Puranic or Vedic events, are called Kshetras.

The Himalayas running southeast from the north, and the Sindhu river running southwest from the north form natural borders, and together with the vast peninsula and nearby islands, carve out the Indian subcontinent, a region in the world like no other. This is the region where higher levels of spiritual elevation and progress were reached by Rishis and their experiences and philosophies recorded as valuable guidelines in the Vedas and Upanishads.

However, in due course, managing homogeneity over such a large landmass became difficult, and spiritual practices began to get scattered into vernacular customs. People began losing knowledge of the significance of rituals, blindly following them just for the sake of it. It was at this juncture that Adi Shankara undertook the Dik-Vijaya and consolidated Indian Spiritual practices, knowledge, rites and rituals, all under the encompassing umbrella of Advaita.

He consolidated deity worship into six categories – or the Shanmata – with the deities being Ganesha, Shiva, Devi, Vishnu, Aditya and Subrahmanya. Following this conceptual framework, and in accordance with geographical boundaries, Kshetras within the subcontinent, pertaining to the Shanmatas soon grew in prominence. Groups of Kshetras emerged, such as Ashta Vinayaka, Jyotirlingas, Shakti Peethas, Navagraha Kshetras etc.

A collection of 108 Kshetras comprising of these Shanmata Kshetra groups forms the Ashtottara Divya Kshetras. In these are Aaru Padai Veedu, Maheshwara Murthi Kshetras, Shakti Peethas, Aakshi Kshetras, Dasha Maha Vidya Kshetras, Svayam Vyakta Kshetras, Nama Smarana Kshetras, Dashaavatara Kshetras, Navagraha and Dikpala Kshetras.

Virtual Kshetraadanam in Tirumala

||Vinaa Venkatesham Nanaatho Nanaathah| Sadaa Venkatesham Smaraami Smaraami|
Hare Venkatesha Praseeda Praseeda| Priyam Venkatesha Prayaccha Prayaccha||

As the first line of this verse goes, there is no other Supreme Lord (Naatha) other than Venkateshwara. This is simply because, just as Bharatavarsha is the Eka-desha containing all sacred Kshetras, and Kashi is the Eka-Kshetra containing all shrines of the Almighty, Sri Venkateshwara of Tirumala is the Eka-Moorthy, containing within Himself, all the deities.

Though this description can be said of any shrine of any deity using the principles of Advaita, Tirumala alone is the foremost Kshetra specializing in the Kali Yuga Varada aspect, chosen by the Almighty particularly for the people, times and circumstances of this present Kali Yuga. In an earlier post, I had elucidated on the specialty of Tirumala, manifesting in different spiritual altitudes as the mighty Govindaadri, and how one could view the different deities of the Shanmata from various heights of Govindaadri.

In understanding this observation and by the Guru's grace, one gets privileged to have the unique Eka-Moorthy Darshan of Sri Venkateshwara, where, deities of the Shanmata from the 108 most important Kshetras are viewed in the Divya Roopa of Sri Venkateshwara.

The photo with this post is a starting step where thumbnails of the 108 Kshetra Deities, along with the Guru, are seen surrounding Sri Venkateshwara. The list of the 108 Kshetra deities, plus the Guru and Venkateshwara Himself are as follows,

Guru Sai Baba, Shirdi, Maharashtra

1. Sindhoora Ganapathi, Morgaon, Maharashtra
2. Siddhi Vinaayaka, Siddhatek, Maharashtra
3. Ucchishta Ganapathi, Vighneshwar, Ozar, Maharashtra
4. Maha Ganapathi, Ranjangaon, Maharashtra
5. Devasena Pati. Thirupparankundram, Tamilnadu
6. Subrahmanya, Tiruchendur, Tamilnadu
7. Dandaayudhapaani, Pazhani, Tamilnadu
8. Swaaminaatha, Swamimalai, Tamilnadu
9. Guruguha, Tiruttani, Tamilnadu
10. Skanda, Pazhamudhircholai, Tamilnadu
11. Bhikshaatana, Kapaali, Mylapore, Tamilnadu
12. Kaama Dahana Moorthy, Thirukorukkai, Tamilnadu
13. Kaala Samhaara Moorthy, Thirukkadaiyur, Tamilnadu
14. Kalyaana Sundareshwara, Thirumanancheri, Tamilnadu
15. Rishabhaaroodha, Dharmasthala, Karnataka
16. Chandrashekhara, Somnath, Gujarat
17. Vishweshwara, Varanasi, Utar Pradesh
18. Nataraja, Chidambaram, Tamilnadu
19. Tripuraantaka, Thiruvadhigai, Tamilnadu
20. Jaalandharaari, Thiruvirkkudi, Tamilnadu
21. Gajaasura Samhaara Moorthy, Vazhuvur, Tamilnadu

22. Veerabhadra, Haridwar, Uttarakhand
23. Shankaranaaraayana, Shankarankovil, Tamilnadu
24. Ardhanaareeshwara, Thiruchengode, Tamilnadu
25. Kirateshwara, Likship, Sikkim
26. Kaala Bhairava, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh
27. Chandesha Anugraha Moorthy, Thiruvaaippaadi, Tamilnadu
28. Chakra Prada, Melaperumpallam, Tamilnadu
29. Somaskanda, Thiyagaraja, Tiruvarur, Tamilnadu
30. Triambakeshwara, Nashik, Maharashtra
31. Pashupatinaatha, Kathmandu, Nepal
32. Lingodbhava, Arunachala, Tiruvannamalai, Tamilnadu
33. Sukhaasana, Kailash, Tibet
34. Bhuvaneshwari, Nainativu, Sri Lanka
35. Kanyakumari, Kanyakumari, Tamilnadu
36. Hamseshwari, Hooghly, West Bengal
37. Chamundeshwari, Mysore, Karnataka
38. Yogaamba, Alampur, Telangana
39. Bhramaraambika, Srisailam, Andhra Pradesh
40. Mahalakshmi, Kolhapur, Maharashtra
41. Ekaveerika, Nanded, Maharashtra
42. Mahakaali, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh
43. Puruhutikaa, Peetapuram, Andhra Pradesh
44. Girija, Jajpur, Odisha
45. Maanikyaamba, Drakshaaraamam, Andhra Pradesh
46. Kaamakhya, Guwahati, Assam
47. Maadhaveshwari, Prayag, Uttar Pradesh
48. Jwaalaamukhi, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh
49. Mangala Gauri, Gaya, Bihar
50. Annapoorna, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
51. Shaarada, Sringeri, Karnataka
52. Vaishnavi, Katra, Jammu & Kashmir
53. Visaalaakshi, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
54. Kaamaakshi, Kanchipuram, Tamilnadu
55. Neelaayadaakshi, Nagapattinam, Tamilnadu
56. Kamalaambika, Tiruvarur, Tamilnadu
57. Meenakshi, Madurai, Tamilnadu
58. Taaraa, Poornagiri, Odisha
59. Bhagavathi, Chottanikkara, Kerala
60. Chhinnamasta, Chintpurni, Una, Himachal Pradesh
61. Dhoomavathi, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
62. Bagalamukhi, Bankhandi, Himachal Pradesh
63. Ranganaatha, Srirangam, Tamilnadu
64. Vitthala, Pandharpur, Maharashtra
65. Bhoo Varaaha, Srimushnam, Tamilnadu

66. Thothaadri Naatha, Naanguneri, Tamilnadu
67. Muktinath, Shaaligram, Nepal
68. Prajaapati Brahma, Pushkar, Rajasthan
69. Satya Naaraayana, Badrinath, Uttarakhand
70. Devaraaja, Naimishaaranyam, Uttar Pradesh
71. Varadaraaja, Kanchipuram, Tamilnadu
72. Janaardhana, Guruvayoor, Kerala
73. Ananta Padmanaabha, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala
74. Sudarshana, Chakkarathalwar, Thirumohur, Tamilnadu
75. Trivikrama, Thirukovilur, Tamilnadu
76. Matsya Narayana, Nagalapuram, Andhra Pradesh
77. Sreedhara Krishna, Udupi, Karnataka
78. Raadhaa Krishna, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh
79. Jagannaatha, Puri, Odisha
80. Lakshmi Narasimha, Ahobilam, Andhra Pradesh
81. Seetaa Raama, Bhadrachalam, Telangana
82. Lakshmi Hayagriva, Thiruvaheendrapuram, Tamilnadu
83. Raamachandra, Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh
84. Vaamana, Thrikakkara, Kerala
85. Raajagopaala, Dwaraka, Gujarat
86. Koorma, Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh
87. Parashurama, Thiruvallam, Kerala
88. Hanuman, Anjanaadri, Karnataka
89. Dharma Shaasta, Sabarimala, Kerala
90. Vishwakarma, Ellora, Maharashtra
91. Dhanvantari, Thottuva, Kerala
92. Soorya, Suryanarkoil, Tamilnadu
93. Chandra, Thingalur, Tamilnadu
94. Angaaraka, Vaitheeswarankoil, Tamilnadu
95. Budha, Thiruvankadu, Tamilnadu
96. Guru, Alangudi, Tamilnadu
97. Shukra, Kanjanur, Tamilnadu
98. Shaneeshwara, Thirunallar, Tamilnadu
99. Raahu, Thirunageshwaram, Tamilnadu
100. Kethu, Kizhperumpallam, Tamilnadu
101. Indra, Tiruvannamalai, Tamilnadu
102. Agni, Tiruvannamalai, Tamilnadu
103. Yama, Tiruvannamalai, Tamilnadu
104. Nirruthi, Tiruvannamalai, Tamilnadu
105. Varuna, Tiruvannamalai, Tamilnadu
106. Vaayu, Tiruvannamalai, Tamilnadu
107. Kubera, Tiruvannamalai, Tamilnadu
108. Eeshana, Amarnath, Jammu & Kashmir
- Venkateshwara, Tirumala, Andhra Pradesh



Figure 15 Kshetra Ashtottara - Part 1/2



Figure 16 Kshetra Ashtottara - Part 2/2

In summary, one is able to visualize the 108 sacred sites (Kshetra-Ashtottara) within the form of Venkateshwara, as the Eka-Moorthy Swaroop. For this reason, this visualization is termed the 'Eka Kshetra-Ashtottara Moorthy', or EKAM.

By the grace of the Guru, contemplating in one's heart (Daharaakaasha) upon the form of Sri Venkateshwara, who is the Divine Mother Herself in Her special and powerful form of Baalaa Tripurasundari, one is able to successfully perform a Kshetraadanam to all these 108 Kshetras without having to move an inch physically. This then leads to the Sookshma Shareera of the Mother – the Sri Yantra, where one advances through multiple Avaranas, reaching the pure Absolute Nirguna Parabrahman in the very centre (Bindu) leading to Sat, Chit and Aananda.



Figure 17 The Sri Yantra

References:

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Lalitha Sahasranamam: <http://vixra.org/abs/1508.0041>

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EKAM and Govindaadri – In Perspective

To understand the significance of the EKAM within the perspective of Govindaadri, one first needs to get an overview of the concept of Panchaayatana, a tradition forming the basis and predecessor to the Shanmata, which in turn is the bedrock of the Kshetra Ashtottara concept.

The Panchaayatana gained prominence at a time when quarrels, rivalry and strife between followers of Shiva, Vishnu and Shakti reached levels of fanaticism. In this context, the Panchaayatana Pooja is a tradition of rituals to be performed, even at home, essentially comprising of daily worship of five important deities, Ganapati, Shiva, Shakti, Vishnu and Aditya, usually involving non-anthropomorphic stone forms such as Shaaligraamas and Baana Lingas. Clearly one of the main intents behind this system was to mitigate the inter-denomination quarrels, while emphasizing on the Advaitic truth that all are forms of the same Brahman. The five deities are also seen as the aspects of the Pancha Bhootas of earth (Kshiti), water (Jala), fire (Agni), air (Vayu) and space (Akasha).

“AkAshasyAdhipo viShNuH agneshchaiva maheshvari vAyoH sUryaH kShiterIshaH jIvanasya gaNAdhipaH”



Figure 18 Panchayatana Pooja with Shiva as the main deity

An interesting aspect of the Panchayatana system is the positioning of the deities, where one of the five is chosen as the ‘main’ deity, usually determined by one’s family tradition, or by one’s wish as Ishta-Devata, and while the main deity is placed at the centre, the other four deities are placed at the four ordinal corners of Northwest, Northeast, Southwest and Southeast. There is significance to such a placement, and this can be understood from the Dikpaalas (guardians) of these directions.



Figure 19 Vaastu Purusha and Dikpaalas, the guardians of the eight directions

1. The Dikpaala of the Northwest direction is Vaayu, the wind God. Thus, this direction is the direction of the vital life-force Praana, and the deity placed here is symbolically the Praana of the central deity.

2. The Dikpaala of the Southeast is Agni, the fire God. This direction is the direction of energy, and the deity placed in this corner is symbolically the energy or the form of spiritual radiation emanating from

the central deity.

3. The Dikpaala of the Northeast is Eeshaana, as the highest of the 36 Tattvas. This direction represents spiritual progress, and the deity placed here represents the more subtle and difficult to access vision one gets of the central deity, when one advances spiritually.

4. The Dikpaala of the Southwest is Nirruti, the Goddess of destruction and disorder. This direction represents spiritual regress, and the deity placed here represents the more gross, and easily accessible form of the central deity, when one descends spiritually.

Thus, one can see that there are two currents of energy flow, through the four ordinal directions. First is the “Life” current running from Northwest to Southeast – from Source (Praana) to Energy (agni). Second is the “Spiritual” current running from Southwest to Northeast – from regress to progress.

One also understands that the Panchaayatana system is a ‘moderated’ tradition. That is, since it involves elements of spiritual progress and regress, Panchaayatana clearly cannot represent either the highest or the lowest level of spiritual advancement. Thus, Panchaayatana cannot correspond to either the highest or the lowest point of Govindaadri.

With this understanding in mind, one is now ready to put EKAM in the Govindaadri perspective. To do this, one first understands that the concept of EKAM is at the level of Kshetras, at which level, Govindaadri is simply Thirumala, a Vishnu Kshetra. Thus, Venkateshwara, as Vishnu becomes the central deity of the Vishnu Panchaayatana, whose positioning is as follows:

a. Vishnu at the centre, as the main deity, represented usually as a Shaaligraama, available at the banks of the Gandaki river in Nepal.

b. Shakti at the Northwest, represented as the Swarnamukhi stone available from the banks of the eponymous river in Andhra Pradesh. Shakti, as the Sahodari (sibling) of Vishnu, is the Yoga Maaya, the very Praana, forming the source, substance and basis of Vishnu.

c. Ganapathi at the Southeast, represented as the red Sonbhadra stone from the Sone river in Bihar. Ganapathi is Vinaayaka, the very form of Omkaara Pranava Swaroopa, and perfectly represents the energy emanating from Vishnu as His grace and blessing.

d. Shiva at the Northeast, represented by the Baana Linga stone from the Narmada river in Madhya Pradesh. Shiva, as the highest of the 36 Tattvas, is pure existence without any attributes, and this is how one sees Vishnu when one advances spiritually stripping away all the characteristic attributes that makes up Vishnu. Clearly, this level of understanding is subtle requires spiritual progress.

e. Aditya at the Southwest, represented by the Vallam Crystal available from Thanjavur in Tamilnadu. Aditya, as Suryanarayana represents the less subtle and more easily accessible form of Vishnu. Since the sun shines upon one and all, regardless of gender, religion, race or age, all one needs to do to see the sun is merely be alive and look up at the skies. This corresponds to the spiritual regress, simplifying oneself from the attribute-filled descriptions of Vishnu.

In accordance with this setup and with Venkateshwara Himself as the central deity of Vishnu, one

picks four of the Kshetra-Ashtottara deities to correspond with the other four deities. These are Maha Ganapathi of Ranjangaon, where the God is seen as the supreme Mahotkata form, Nataraja of Chidambaram which is believed to be the very heart of Shaivism, Kamakshi of Kanchipuram representing Lalitha Maha Tripura Sundari, the earliest as well as most supreme cosmic form of Shakti, and Soorya of Suryanarkoil, representing Aditya. These are the four to be seen in the four ordinal corners, with Venkateshwara in the centre facing east.

The other 104 of the Kshetra-Ashtottara deities are seen to surround this setup, on all four sides. Guru, as Sai is seen above Venkateshwara, representing the supreme Parabrahman on the Crown (Sahasrara) Chakra of the Worshipper, Worship and the Worshipped, signifying the oneness between the trio. Sri Yantra, representing the ultimate manifestation of Parabrahman in the form of the Universal Mother as the universe, is seen below the Lord's feet, signifying that this expansion and manifestation of Sat-Chit-Aananda as Ambika is the very platform and basis for everything that is being seen, experienced and discussed here. This representation of the EKAM as Panchayatana shall be termed Pancha-EKAM.

It is interesting to note that while Pancha-EKAM is a Kshetra level representation, and the virtual Kshetraadanam focuses more on the concept and is at a level higher than the physical level. This has three points of significance:

1. The physical particularities of Kshetras such as their location, shape, size, color etc do not have any significance at this stage.

2. Because of this, the Pancha-EKAM setup is merely a lower level manifestation of the higher level Govindaadri truth: that all EKAM deities are within the Venkateshwara form itself. Thus, one sees these Pancha-EKAM Kshetras surrounding Venkateshwara as the physical aspects of the concepts already embodied within the Lord. One sees, for example, the Aru Padai Veedu of Subrahmanya, as within Venkateshwara at the conceptual level. At this level, Tiruchendur symbolizes the courageous victory of good over evil as Taarakaasura, Pazhani represents resplendence of pure Jnaana Shakti, Swamimalai represents the very Pranava and the role of a Guru, and Pazhamudhircholai represents the magnificent union of Iccha, Jnaana and Kriya Shaktis as Valli, Skanda and Deivanai respectively. These are the concepts one sees in Venkateshwara, of which the form of the Kshetras seen surrounding Venkateshwara are merely manifestations.

3. To signify this fact, and to understand that at the conceptual level, individual deities and their characteristics matter no more, the arrangement of the 104 deities surrounding Panchaayatana in Pancha-EKAM are randomly arranged, without any specific order. Thus, Mahakali of Ujjain is as much a form of Parabrahman as Devasenaapati of Thirupparankundram or Varuna of Varuna Lingam in Thiruvannamalai.

In summary, within the framework of Govindaadri, Pancha-EKAM is seen from a Kshetra level, just slightly above the level of Tirumala, with Venkateshwara seen to embody concepts of the Kshetra-Ashtottara deities, with the forms of these deities seen in a virtual Kshetraadanam as a Panchayatana setup surrounding the Lord.



Figure 20 Pancha-EKAM Visualization of Venkateshwara

Navavaranas of the Sri Yantra

As the very platform and basis for everything in the universe, including Govindaadri, the Sri Yantra leads one to the ultimate Parabrahman, in the form of the Mother Ambika. This is done through nine enclosures, called Nava-Aavaranas going inwards, with each one signifying a more subtle perspective than the previous. This section of the article looks at these enclosures as revealed in the Kamalamba Navavarana Krithis of Muthuswamy Dikshitar.

These songs are steeped in philosophical content, apart from being masterpieces of grammatical and musical expertise. Through these Krithis, Dikshitar has made the esoteric and lofty Sri Vidya Tantra, accessible to the common man. He has done this by extolling the Universal Mother as Kamalambika through the nine enclosures, called Avaranas of the Sri Yantra, the most complex geometrical pattern representing the mechanism of the entire cosmos.

The pinnacle of these Navavarana Krithis and the philosophy contained therein, and thus of all Dikshitar Krithis, is the ninth Avarana Krithi, Sri Kamalamba Jayati in Aahiri Raagam, a melody that serves well to bring one to a contemplative, meditative and spiritual mood. This Krithi extols Kamalambika in the Bindu, which is the centre point of the Sri Yantra, and hence the focal point and very source of all creation and all energy. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Mother Herself appeared as Dikshitar's word, thought and deed (Kaayaka-Maanasa-Vaachana) to bring forth this masterpiece of a composition.

As an outpouring of the very essence of Sri Vidya Jnaana and Bhakti, this Krithi has eight sections in each of the eight Vibhaktis (grammatical case-endings) of the Sanskrit language, envisioning the Goddess in eight different forms, and with Kamalambika Herself as the prelude, this Krithi contains Nine Different Visions of the Mother, corresponding to the nine Avaranas of the Sri Yantra, and with each vision symbolizing one deep philosophical aspect of Sri Vidya. The following details the nine visions through this masterpiece.



Figure 21 The nine visions of Ambika in the song

1. Kamalambika (Ninth Avarana – Prelude)

Sri Kamalamba Jayati – Amba – Jagadamba

Shringaara Rasa Kadamba Madamba - Chidbimba Pratibimbendu Bimba

(Sri Kamalamba is always victorious. She is the Mother, the Universal Mother, the epitome of Shringaara Rasa, the king of emotions. She is the Radiance of Consciousness, ChidBimba, as well as the Radiance arising out of the reflection of Consciousness.)

In this vision, the Mother is the deity of Tiruvarur, as Kamalambika, who is the Mother of the entire universe, as well as representative of both Shiva, as the Prakasha and Shakti, as the reflection or Vimarsha. This is why Kamalambika has Her own temple inside the Thyagaraja temple and there is no separate Shakti or Shiva shrines in Her temple.

2. Kameshwara-Kameshwari (First Avarana – Nominative Vibhakti)

Sripurabindu Madhyastha Chintamani Mandirastha Shivakara Manchasthita ShivaKaameshaangastha

(She is in the centre, the Bindu of the Sri Yantra, in the wish-fulfilling Chintamani Palace. She sits on the seat that is Shiva Himself, and as the part of Shiva Kaameshwara.)

In the very centre of Sri Yantra lies the Bindu, inside the Chintamani Palace, sitting on the Pancha Brahma Asana consisting of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Eeshwara and Sadashiva. It is interesting to note that the Lalitha Sahasranama says that these five deities are known as Pancha Brahma only when they are with their respective Shaktis, else they are known as Pancha Preta. Of these five, the first four are the four legs of the Mother's throne, whereas Sadashiva forms the seat. Sadashiva as one of the Pancha Brahmas is none other than Ardhanarishwara, with Shiva and Shakti as the two halves. The Mother is beyond even this Shiva-Shakti, as She is the origin of both Shiva and Shakti. This is shown as the Kameshwara-Kameshwari depiction of the Mother.

3. Rajarajeshwari (Second Avarana – Accusative Vibhakti)

Sukaraananaadi Archita Maha Tripurasundarim Rajarajeshwarim Shrikara Sarvanandamaya Chakravaasinim Suvaasinim Chintaye Aham

(I contemplate upon Rajarajeshwari, the most beautiful of the three worlds worshipped by Vaaraahi and others, the Suvaasini residing in the auspicious Sarvanandamaya Chakra.)

In the Lalithopakhyana, one observes the Mother slaying Bhandasura, who represents ignorance. In this venture, the Mother in the Sri Yantra is flanked by two Goddesses, Mantrini or Maatangi, who is the Counsellor, and Dandanaatha or Vaaraahi, who is Her Commander-in-Chief. This is the vision of the second Avarana, which extols the Bindu as the Sarvaanandamaya Chakra, or the Chakra which is the very representation of the Sat-Chit-Aananda Parabrahman.

4. Trinetra (Third Avarana – Instrumental Vibhakti)

Divaakara Sheetakirana Paavakaadi Vikaasakaraya Bheekara Taapatrayaadi Bhedana Dureenataraya Paakaripu Pramukhaadi Praarthita Sukalebharaya Praakatya Paraaparaya Paalito Dayaakaraya

(I have been graced by the manifest of both the supreme (para) and empirical (apara), who has the Sun, Moon and Fire as Her three eyes, who removes the three sufferings caused by Nature, God and Man, and who is the beauty-filled form worshipped by Indra and others.)

In this vision, the focus is on the Mother's three eyes. The first two, Her right and Left eyes are Surya

and Chandra, representing Pingala-Ida, or the physical and mental aspects. These also represent Shiva and Shakti. The dynamics in the union of Shiva and Shakti creates ripples of consciousness, which grows and spreads across the entire universe as a wave. This wave is the Pranava or Omkara. The result of Shiva-Shakti union is Skanda, which is Her third eye of Fire, seen as the sixth Chakra or Aajna Chakra. These three eyes are adept in removing the three kinds of sufferings – Aadhibhautika, Aadhidaivika and Aadhyaatma.

5. Mahamaya (Fourth Avarana – Dative Vibhakti)

Srimaatre Namaste Chinmaatre Sevita Ramaa Hari Eesha Vidhaatre

(Salutations to the Universal Mother, who is pure Consciousness and worshipped by Lakshmi, Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma.)

In this vision, Kamalambika is seen as the Universal Mother, who is beyond the Trinity. She is thus the Mahamaya.

6. Pranava (Fifth Avarana – Ablative Vibhakti)

Vaamaadi Shakti Poojita Paradevatayah Sakalam Jaatam

(Everything is born out of the Paradevata, who is worshipped by the three Shaktis of Vama, Jyeshta and Raudri.)

The three Shaktis of Vama, Jyeshta and Raudri represent Iccha-Jnana-Kriya or the trio of Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati, as well as the three Gunas of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Thus, these Shaktis represent the A, U and M, which together form the Pranava Omkara, the aspect of the Mother from which everything arises.

7. Panchadashi (Sixth Avarana – Possessive Vibhakti)

Kaamaadi Dvaadashabhir Upaasita Kaadi Haadi Saadi Mantra Roopinyah

(She is of the form of the Panchadashi Mantra worshipped by the twelve devotees starting with Manmatha.)

Kaadi, Haadi and Saadi refer to the three versions of the fifteen lettered Panchadashi Mantra of the Mother in Sri Vidya, and the letters Ka, Ha and Sa are also an allusion to the three parts of this Mantra. This Mantra, to be recited only after Deeksha from a Guru, is the most esoteric of Mantras, and forms the crux of the Srividya tradition. The three parts (Kootas) of this Mantra are said to be the three parts of the Ambika Herself. The twelve primary devotees are Manu, Chandra, Kubera, Lopamudra, Manmatha, Agastya, Nandi, Soorya, Vishnu, Shiva, Shanmukha and Durvasa.

8. Skandamaata (Seventh Avarana – Locative Vibhakti)

Premaaspada Shiva Guruguha Jananyaam Preetiyukta Macchittam Vilayatu

(Let my mind be ever immersed in Her with Bhakti, who is the beloved Mother of Guruguha.)

In this vision, Kamalambika is seen as the Mother of Subrahmanya. Addressing Muruga as Shiva Guruguha refers to Muruga as Swaminatha expounding the Pranava to Shiva, and thus Shiva Guru, and Guha, as the secret One. Of the six faces of Muruga, five are seen to represent the five faces of Sadashiva, whereas the sixth is Adhomukha, making Muruga the “Sadashiva + 1”. While the five faces represent the Pancha Bhootas, the sixth face is the one looking inwards and represents Pranava. Thus Skanda is the direct union of Shiva and Shakti and is thus above Sadashiva and the other four of the Pancha Brahmas. This is why Muruga, as Swaminatha of Swamimalai has to explain Omkara to Sadashiva.

9. Somaskanda (Eighth Avarana – Vocative Vibhakti)

Brahmamaya Prakaashini Naamaroopa Vimarshini Kaamakalaa Pradarshini Saamarasya Nidarshini
(You are the Prakasha, the radiance of pure Brahman. You are the Vimarsha, reflective of name and form. You display the Kaamakalaa union. You reveal the true identity of one's Atma.)

In this, the most crucial of the eight Vibhakti forms in this song, Kamalambika is envisioned as Somaskanda. Somaskanda, split as Sha+Uma+Skanda is a form consisting of Shiva, Shakti and Skanda. As the purely radiant Prakasha of Parabrahman, the Mother is Shiva. As the Vimarsha giving name and form to Prakasha, She is Shakti. As the Kaamakalaa, She is Skanda, the union of Shiva-Shakti. Together, the Somaskanda is the true nature of the Atma. This is the same trio seen as the Mother's three eyes of sun, moon and fire, and this form is the very essence of the 999th Nama "Shiva Shakti Aikya Svaroopini" in the Lalitha Sahasranamam.

Conclusion

After a brief glimpse into the 'mysteries' and legends associated with the deity of Tirumala, this article focuses on Venkateshwara, the Lord of this sacred site, understanding Him to be the Kali Yuga Varadha, or the source of solace and salvation in the present era of Kali. Looking further, one finds within the deity, aspects of the six major deities of the Shanmata tradition, as well as the Guru. This is visualized through the concept of Spiritual Altitude, depicted as the 'spiritual hill' of Govindaadri. This leads to the Lord being called as "Eka-Moorthy", containing all divinity within Himself. As an extension to that thought, the article then discusses on the 108 sacred sites of Shanmata, called the Kshetra-Ashtottara, and how one can, merely contemplating upon Venkateshwara, perform a virtual 'Kshetraadanam' to these sites. This visualization is termed "Eka Kshetra-Ashtottara Moorthy" (EKAM). Reconciling this concept with Govindaadri using the Panchaayatana concept leads to yet another visualization, termed "Pancha-EKAM".

In summary, this article elaborates upon a series of inquiries, thoughts and revelations to the author, regarding the nature of the Lord Venkateshwara, in various levels of Spiritual Altitudes, which are essentially measures of Spiritual Inclusivity. The most important observation and value-add from these discussions is that Tirumala of Venkateshwara is indeed the most sacred Kshetra of Baalaa Tripurasundari, who is the very special form of the Universal Mother Ambika, manifest with the core intention of "Kali Yuga Varadha". By thus contemplating upon Venkateshwara as Baalaa, Tirumala, as Govindaadri becomes the transition point from the physical level, represented by various Kshetras, to the highest spiritual level, represented by the Sri Yantra, which is the ultimate representation of the universe, leading to the supreme Sat Chit Aananda Parabrahman in the form of the Universal Mother Ambika.

Finally, the article concludes by observing that worship in the form of Mantras and verses to different deities, which are Saguna aspects of that Nirguna Parabrahman, is like taking water from the vast sea and offering it back to the sea as Arghya, as beautifully portrayed by the 100th and final verse of Aadi Shankara's Saundarya Lahari in praise of the Universal Mother:

"Pradeepa Jwaalaabhir Divasakara Neeraajana Vidhih
Sudhaasute Chandropala Jalalavair Arghya Rachana
Svakeeyair Rambhobhih Salila Nidhi Sauhitya Karanam
Tvadeeyaabhih Vaakbhih Tava Janani Vaachaam Stutiriyam"