THAT LORD SIVA TO BE ADORED

A mini - compendium of 300 saivite shannas

By

Prof. K. K. Moorthy

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and bhairavathis
Pancharamas

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Indonesia, Vietnam, Nepal and S Lanka

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Which
the Fun-loving Tourists
God instigated The ills
Knowledge-Seeking Artists
desire to enjoy, imbibe and enrich

(vide infra)
THAT LORD SIVA TO BE ADORED
A mini-compendium of 303 sarvata shrines

Inclusive of
Dwadasa Jyotirlinga kshetras, Panchabhutassthala, Pancharama;
PLUS
those situated in
Nepal, Srilanka, Vietnam and Indonesia

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INVOCATION

Shareth thy potent body to Mother Parvathi to establish equality
Drinketh Halahalam, the most lethal to keep the worlds in safety
Makest the rat-borne Vinayaka, the winner extinguishing respect for equity
Snappest the worldly pans for liberation to express thy benignity

Thou art the cause of creation, yet presidest over dissolution
Withholding nothing, giveth any boon at the cost of self privation
Altho' a bundle of contradictions, keep the opposites ever in fusion
Thy sports O Mahadevi! mystifying the mystery defy any description

Releasing from this world, grant us that unique Chaya Mukti
The shadow being inseparable from thy body, it's a Mahasakti
Deemed greater than the Satekya, Sarupya, even Sayuja Prapti
So, bless us merge in Thy Chaya O Lord! for our Saavata Vinmukti

***
INTRODUCTION

Certainly, there can be no two opinions on the intentions of the humanist sage-seers in causing the temples built by ruling class and the theist public, even as early as in the Kritayuga, better say, since the blossoming of theism. With their inner eye—antarachakshu— they realised the infinite potentialities of the places of worship, built for any god-head, as a matter of fact. They even incorporated therein writings vividly the advantages of individual and congregational prayers in temples, along with ritualistic worship to the adorable gods. They installed icons according to the agamic canons with mantra, yantra and tantra of their own making and proved the efficacy of temple worship. They intended, rather intensely craved for the creation of the ‘Vasudhaika Kutumbham’—one world family through temples, temples and temples alone, which invariably bring mankind under one roof, transcending all barriers, like race, religion, caste, cult, age, sex and the like. This tradition was honoured, and is being implemented down the ages without any trace of doubt or contradiction.

And none can gainsay the fact that the temples are, and have been the citadels of culture, cradles of religion, centres of national integration, since they cement the faith of the devotional community in that All-Time-Highest and mould the life of mankind. The emotional cohesion that emerges in the daura sannidhas is beyond description. This basic conviction impelled the philanthropists to enter the arena and appease their devotional thirst through constructing gigantic temples in the modern age, as democracy has replaced the royalty. Of course, their zeal and resources may not match the fervour and involvement of their models of the bygone past, yet their contribution is highly commendable. For, some of the shrines that are built in this century have claimed the additional advantage of catering to the needs of the moderns, whose taste or temperament is daubed with western paint, due to the impact of foreign rule and spirit of the time.

Keeping in view of the multifarious benefits of the place of worship conferring on humanity, I desired to lift the curtain on the glory of the ancient temples in my own humble way, after retirement, as I had the opportunity of visiting hundreds of the most ancient, well-built, largely venerated, widely popular, piously consecrated shrines strewn over entire Bharat, not by compulsion but by option. Although I did write and publish more than ten books on temples alone under two series - The Abodes of Gods Series in seven volumes, and three in The Single Temple Series with the timely financial assistance of the T.T.D., Tirupathi, which won the appreciation of the highly educated, theists, specialists, tourists, research scholars etc. both in India and abroad, my hunger has not been quenched, nor filled
the revered void fully. So, when I embarked upon a new venture, rather another series - captivated, 'The Shrines Superb' in five volumes, I was solicited by a few to devote one book for the Siva kshetras. Moreover, my visits to Sivalayas, numbering more than hundred and longing to bring out the multidimensional splendour of SIVA convinced me that the new proposal would suit my writing project and be received well by the theist community as it did in the past. Soon I chose the material and affixed a label - That Lord Siva I Adored and decided to print 100 short write-ups of temples, the very same ones I visited, including the most visit-worthy Dwadasa Jyotirlinga kshetras, Pancha Bhutashtalas and Pancharamas, and I did complete a major portion of the composition by then. Suddenly there appeared a hair-pin bend on the road of my journey, and while negotiating it, I tumbled upon a great treasure that lured, but marred the proposal mooted first, i.e. the books I chance to procure without conscious effort, as a matter of fact, lifted the curtain on that Almighty Highest SIVA Revealing His cosmic form, in a flash, as it were, showed hundreds and hundreds of Mandirs wherein He has been abiding since time immemorial to lifting the deserving Saranagathas with His abundant compassion on their accepting Him as their only Saviour, with absolute, unconditional, unalterable surrender to Him and His will.

The legends of some of the ancient Sivalayas are so soul-lifting that they held tight grip and metamorphosed me into altogether a changed man, yes changed in outlook, purpose, goal etc. And subjectivity, thus substituted by objectivity gave scope for inclusion of many temples. It encompasses wider field, ready to serve greater number with stronger appeal. A wide range of infinite number of sports He played. I thought then, deserve wider canvas and broader visualisation. As I turned the pages, the picture that emerged seemed so colourful and multifaceted that I determined instantly to alter the title from - That Lord Siva I Adored, to That Lord Siva to be Adored, which positively accommodates greater number and allows to be fed by a multifarious kind of dishes. Grown jubilant, I essayed to recast the entire mass of writing to suit the new scheme thought of. Then came another point demanding deep deliberation - what to augment and how many temples to be included. As if a bolt from the blue, a new wave rising suddenly inspired me to touch upon certain basic concepts of Siva, like His paratattva, mysticism of the cosmic dance, efficacy of the Siva Panchakahi, types of prayer services, emblems of Siva etc. Deeming it useful and plausible I stretched my hands for food bottle, and lo! I was overpowered by the fund of relevant information glancing at me covetously I grabbed much, and by aslifting the chaff, I selected only a few topics and satisfied to give only bare outlines of every item, for the main reason my acquisition of spiritual lore, to be true, is poor, and with that little, if I make a dive, coming out of it never arises. For, when browsing over a few authentic treatises, I was so confounded with some of the hair-splitting arguments, that they left me blank. The highly advanced mysticism is far beyond the grasp or grip, nor is it necessary for books on temples. A few, bare, externals, I inferred
suffices the purpose, and so incorporated them in the preparatory part. They in fact serve the reader greatly, since nothing acquaintance at least is indispensable for an Indian, whether he professes Hinduism or not.

Having given the priority to the basic facts of Sanism, I then decided to increase the original number of temples from 100 to 300. Surprised? Need not be. For there are thousands and thousands of temples for Siva scattered across the country from Somanath in Gujrat to Bel in Indonesia, breadthwise and Amarnath to Trincomalee lengthwise as Sivism is the oldest religion and was followed and propagated some millenniums of years before the birth of Christ. Some books procured divulged a wide range of fantastic and exotic fascinating and awesome legends of the places, which He chose to dwell in from the Vedic age in some cases, after accomplishing the purpose of His descent, either at the request of the locals or out of His own choice. And each place of His dwelling is endowed with an aura that not only succeeded in heightening His divine image, but is mesmerizing and turning the visitors godward instantly and everlasting, since the vestiges of the Siva lies found in several forms, like inscriptions and monuments bearing unmistakable imprints of their erstwhile existence and glory would convince even the hard core agnostics.

Armed with such wisdom, I started gleaming the appropriate materials from the voluminous literature awaiting my touch. But here the problem of selection assumed such proportions that I was caught up in a maze of most intricate type. What should be the criteria, where to begin and how to end confronted me in its ghastliness, for the oddity and singularly attending on each temple history thoroughly subdued my powers of description. Each temple has a buzzard background shrouded in mysticism and does not allow its elimination. Look! How can I bypass such divine subterfuges, the scenes of incomparable awesome miraculous acts of the Lord, like His turning sentinel to keep guard a demon’s palace, begging in the streets to appease the hunger of a bhakta, bursting out from the lungs to destroy the God of Death to save a devotee, donning the midwife’s dress to help a helpless pregnant devotee in throes of severest type, sending millions of honey bees to put to rout the formidable army of a ruthless conqueror trying to blow up the place of worship, forcing an iconoclast to retreat at break neck speed with a single piercing look, acting as messenger of love between the adorers, working as labourer to an old lady in distress, punishing the European officers for underestimating the ritualistic prayer services, performing the funereal obsequies of a devout king like son, etc. etc. etc. etc. Not only these fantastic accounts find place in the scriptural writings, but the evidence of enactment of such magnificent sports and the places of action are existing and striking the eye, and persuading to take the truth at face value, since deceit with false face or pretentious looks cannot enter the precincts of the abodes of gods, much less dreams of defiling their sanctity.

That selection though harder than the Herculean task reached its destination at long last. There aghast then another pose —
whether lunge — Phallus, the visible representation of that invisible Omnipotent, be given space, i.e. does it need description, or elucidation at all, since except in the case everywhere it is cylindrical in form with a rounded top and mostly black granite. Further, the fact that the accepted emblems—lunge and yoni are nothing but the symbols of biological act, instrumental for the creation of all the living creatures in the world need space. This significant import needs no concealment nor its explanation be deemed indecent. For at Guhmalam, near Tirupati, Vide No 119 the lunge is so made to resemble the male genital organ in upraised position. These pure symbols of universal parents indispensable for production of life must be venerated without reservation at the first sight itself. So their philosophy and import, kunda, distinctive merits of each have encroached considerable space. Moreover, at certain places the installation of lunge is made in strange fashions — placing of seven lunge one over the other with holes on Panavetta for the abhishek water to pass through and fall into the receptacle placed outside Vide No 141. Strangely enough, there is a rare Sivalinga with two holes on its top, swallowing barrels of water, Vide No... and at another place the lunge changing colours to act as barometer Vide No: 191. Again the panavettas too are not uniform, they are completely circular, wheel shaped — Vide No 140 in a few places, why even square shaped, deviating from the normal circular shape drawn to a point on the north side for water to flow down.

Such oddities galore seemed racing one after another, as it were, flashing across my mind demanded incorporation. Look at the extra-ordinary tradition of installing eight lunge — Aishwarya lunge on one and the same panavetta, the central one bag in size and the other satellite lunge smaller Vide No 40 Another A Sivalinga with a broad Vide No 85 and at another place a Sivalinga installed in a topless deerless temple, but has huge number of adherers Vide No 82. One more awesome feature of the existence of 108 temples each with a lunge in one and the same campus, arranged in two concentric circles, the outer one consisting of 66 temples with lunge of two different colours — black and white installed alternately in a masterly way, whereas in the inner circle there are 42 temples drowning black lunge one each. To crown all as it were, the Sivalingas are installed and ardently worshipped with periodical festivals not in Sivasayes but in Jain Mandire Vide No 51. An outstanding marvel that can far surpass any unique feature of all time appreciation. All these, I felt merit inclusion, and I did. So the volume grew bulkier. Would the introduction lag behind?

Yet, I have to add two more points before taking it to FINALE. One—my sticking to the method of computation and permutation of the temples—arranging them state—wise, after limiting the selection to 300. I based the criteria of selection upon FIVE points. Vis. installations, visitations and adoration. Firstly, the are ancient ones — say yugas old, came into the dawn of history; secondly — their emergency the descend of Siva and demonstration of His awesome sports; thirdly — installation of the archaical — made by gods or godmen; and fourthly their visitation by illustrious men, such as
maharashtra, ministrels - god's deputies, pravakta, men of eminence etc, and finally the adoration by people in huge numbers either regularly or periodically Does not greater the number imply holier the kshetra? Strict adherence to the above is neither possible nor essential, but I kept them as guiding principle mainly Non-inclusion of certain indispensably superior shrines, I admit, is only, due to non-availability of source material, and my limited sources - both financial and spiritual, but not to deliberate negligence

The last point is about plates. The object of adoration in all Siva-ayanas is invariably LINGA, and its shape everywhere needless to say, remains same, although size varies And colour too. Moreover, photographing of the Dhruvaberas is strictly prohibited all over the world. only its artistic copy in black and white, or colour is available and so a few are included to give representation. In certain places the icons of Siva in Uma Maheswar and Ardhanareswar aspects are adored, and they too are printed.

Having listened to the long account of my objective and the efforts I put in to hit the target I think, the reader would certainly turn pages to test the veracity of narration, and if attempted, I deem it great honour done to me. for, I am sure hundred percent that a change would come over him even on reading a few pages, which propels him to visit some places atleast. That is enough, since that Almighty Lord abiding in them definitely stretches His long, warm loving, hands to take him into His fold. Then begins His work and that ends my part Presuming my ambition will soon blossom, if not bear instant fruit I wish to withdraw from the scene with a suggestion for those, who desire to read elaborate accounts on some of the temples, to read my books published in two series referred to. Another information, if needed - anything about the temples included may be obtained from me, even the copies of my books at reasonably reduced price. for the publication enterprise, I embarked upon is only to serve and widen the horizon of the spiritual knowledge than to be profited by Write and obtain.

Now comes the the redemption of indebtedness. For inspiration, subsistence, and successful accomplishment of this great mahayagna, many visible and invisible agencies contributed their mighty mite, when solicited in person or by letters. First in order comes the reference books that formed the bedrock of his work. They are acknowledged separately.

Coming to the immediate and infinite assistance extended, I must mention first T.T Devasthanams Experts Committe, whose sagacious selection and magnificent grant for publication of this book is unparalleled and unforgettable. Shri N.S. Ramamurthy M.A. Editor-in-charge of Sampatana was generous enough to accept the late submission of the script and strove to see it come out tagged with the label 'A id Granted'. My Palms join at the mention his name, and to the members of the Committee and its Chief for their bounteous help. My friend philosopher-guide Mr. Sreepen, Sub-Editor (English) who supplied the available books from his personal library, time and again ungrudgingly and liberally deserves reverent mention.
and whole-hearted grateful thanks. And to Mr. Narasimha M.A. Sub-Editor (Kannada) too for enlightenment on temples of Karnataka. More than the routine turn out, my daughter Kavitha put in strenuous efforts for over six months towards the completion of the work in several aspects, like typing, proof-reading, collating etc. and Kiran who attended to mailing and typing, and many for supplying steaming cups of tea more often than not meant highest appreciation and God's infinite compassion. I invoke the grace of the Almighty Providence to bless them for future bright and life prosperous.

Lesser composing work done by Sri D. Bahu and his assistant, Madras deserves wide publicity and God's munificent benediction, and I add my own for their enviable progress. Above all, I owe my genuine thanks to many, like the Adviser of Central Library Dr. Ravulra Suryanarayana Murthy garu, and Prof. & Head of the Dept. of Far East Studies Dr. A. Lakshmana Chetty garu and the librarians of SV. University Local Regional Library Oriental Research Institute for their willing cooperation and timely assistance. And to Mr. N. R. Raaghavan garu, the amiable and efficient Manager, India Book Distributors, Anna Sain, Madras for infinite new courage in addition to acquainting me with most essential entrepreneurial skill to making this entering and purposeful salable and profitable without which this would not appear as it is, and keenly attention. His refined sense of religious and abundant magnanimity merit salutary observance. Finally I owe my whole-hearted gratitude to Mr. R. Muthukumara, garu the Managing Director, The South India Saini Siddhanta Works publishing Society, Alwarpet, Madras for breathing life into this by supplying the right literature, at the right time for the right cause. His munificent assurance and ebullient dynamism, filling my being remained with me till having down the pen. I express my genuine gratefulness again for fortification of affection

Though Dr. Jagesh, the apothegm artist's name comes at the end, his brush work striking the eyebeckons our attention first, since the beautified the image of the LORD glorified and heightened the splendour of the title page. He deserves rich tributes from the viewers and readers as well. I thank him profusely for his magnanimous help and generous response.

Finally I express my irredeemable debt of gratitude to the Triple Deity - Mother Adi Parvathi, Bala and Mahawar for standing in mind and moving my hand on paper from start to finish of this stupendous work. As words could not describe, nor emotion exhaust my indebtedness, I only fall flat before them mite, for all given and continuance of grace for farther trekking across the unexplored regions for the benefit of the interested thesists and my contemporain also.

May I write opinion, remarks, suggestions to making this work into ever green, bearing devious fruits round the year?

Yours ever

(signed) K.K. Murthy
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**Note:** The table above lists the districts of Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.
I. SIVAPARATATTVA AND ITS IMPORT

It is better to begin with the beginning. As we are stepping on the very portals of the citadel of Vedanta Philosophy, awareness of the basic concepts of theism and fundamentals of the paratattva of the Supreme Reality, like its origin, connotation, import and purport becomes a necessity of utmost importance. Certainly it eases our comprehension and enhances the zeal for adoration, by creating conditions congenial for its progress. Labour is holy and pays dividends.

Don't we see plants in their full bloom putting forth lovely blossoms fragrant, and feasting the eyes of the spectators, if watered timely and tended properly? So, let us now throw a quick look at the preliminaries, like the meaning of the word SIVA. In its entirety at it. But listen! Our source material is taken from the scriptures written in Sanskrit. It is rather soaked in it, use of its terminology is inevitable. But I essayed to give their equivalents in English. So put up and proceed.

Siva, the disyllabic word, though appears short and common place - uttered by one and all, and heard day in and day out, its significance is beyond explanation and exploration. Although it means 'Subham' - auspiciousness, it encompasses the widest spiritual world and enshrines in itself the quintessence of the Hindu theism in its pristine form and fullest splendour. It is a shortened form, standing for Maheswar, one of the TRY, holding the august office of LAYA - dissolution of the life of the created beings. And He is the Ultimate Reality and equated with Parabrahman as referred to in the Upanishads. It is this paratattva that comprises an inexhaustible wealth of meaning that explains the cause of cosmos. It transcends the three principal gunas - sublime, passion and ignorance.
- satvarajastamastrigunatesa. It is ever auspicious-
  nityamangala; ever blissful - sadasukhaprada; and ever
  consoling - nitya sampritikara. It is eternal - sanathan;
the cause of all causes - sarvakaranakarka; protector of
worlds - Jagadrakshaka; and bestower of emancipation -
mekhapradayaka. Moreover, it is the wealth that confers
passionlessness - niramayam; stainlessness - nirmalam and
steadfastness - nirvikalpam. It is a unique, supreme,
divine object, bereft of beginning, middle and end -
sadimadhyantarabhi; and above form and name -
namarupaateeta. It is a divine word standing for the
inseparable - akhandita; infinite - anantaha; immanent -
akhilasthalsvyapka - inexhaustible, avyaya; irrepressible -
ajeya; and ever real; ever beautiful and ever pleasant in
form - nityasaatyasundararupa, responsible for the very
breathing. It is the cause of a well integrated, whole,
huge and subtle, visible and invisible, individual and
collective corporal world — sthula sukhama, drishtyadrishtya,
vyaasti samati caracaraprapancha. And the only bright,
effulgent light, ruling, directing, guiding, correcting, inspiring
and propelling the animate and inanimate cosmos. In brief,
it is a word synonym for Parabrahma, Vishnu Paramatma
and Parameshwar.

The Vedas emphasise in unmistakable terms thus
- “Sivaatparataram nasti” — there is no greater god other
than Siva; and this Parabrahman Siva is superior to
everyone and everything else in the cosmos.

“Prasnaadams Yashchiva Saktystamakam thatchaktyantai
Svaadhiyam Sadhanavya sthun thathivah
Saivacararthadh Kadadavekhyam bhavyaamand
Dhyayaam Pradhamaam Chakipujaan”.

This establishes once for all, that it is Siva, and
Siva alone is that supreme power deserves to be
remembered and worshipped first. The statement ‘Ekam
Sat Vipra bahuda Vadanti” corroborates, that this is the
truth which the learned men speak of in many ways. So,
it appropriately called Him — ‘sarva sunya niralamasthala’
means thereby, that Absolute is without second; support;
and this Adipurusha is above name, form and tattva. And
beyond the positive and negative attributes, together with
the concept of time also. It is this Siva's supreme power of super consciousness — mahachaitanya, that is manifesting in the atom of atoms, glory of glories, fragment of the unfragmented, and one in all. In fine, Siva Himself is Pranava, the Premordial Energy standing for the inexhaustible, imperishable, immutable, invisible, immaculate, infinite power that makes the doctrine accepts its inability to cover all His facets. He is peerless and timeless. Hence the Saivagamas discard the notion of pantheism or polytheism. They emphasize and advocate Absolute Monism out and out.

The sacred scriptures of Hindus, particularly the Rudradhyaya of Krishna Yajurveda, Chandogya, Svetaveda Upanishads and several Puranas have tried to bring out the elusive splendour of His myriad forms and imitable glory, but in vain Siva, that Ultimate Reality is beyond the range or words and thought.

If language describes His power and glory, would it not tantamount to His own creation scoring victory over Him? Does it not pose a challenge to His Omnipotence? Son never outgrows father in age. The created never surpasses its unsurpassable Creator. The unexcelled excellences of that Supreme Reality should remain as such only to keep its offspring perpetually gaping and gazing with infinite awe and admiration as a mark of expression of devotion to that extent of ultimate dissolution and total absorption into that greatest Him. How could the yearning of Jivatma to merge into that Paramatma better expressed? What else remains for mankind other than that Sayujyamukti — absorption of its Atmajyoti into that Paranjyoti? That alone should be the life's highest and surest craving of mankind, declares the wisdom of our Maharshis.

Does the mere recognition of this truth universal lead one to goal? Should it end there abruptly? Deep probe decides. No doubt that recognition itself is a major success for realisation and indicates one's moving towards God-head. It very well reflects the maturity of mind, evolution of soul, better say, the first sign of his one's casting off the slough of sin and stepping on the first rung of the ladder connecting Heaven with this mundane
world. But it is not enough. What then is to be pursued? How to commence it? Are the avenues opened to admit him for treading the righteous path, leading to the destination? Can he undertake that arduous journey alone, or does he require guidance? What are the means and how to obtain them? They have to be considered deeply, searched for laboriously and select suitably in the beginning itself. Then remains one’s clinging to them steadfastly, and finally implementing tenaciously till the goal is reached.

The following pages shed a ray of light on those important ways. Visualising first the distinct and salient features of the Supreme Reality, and then highlight in brief the procedure to reach the lotus feet of Siva, abiding in numerous forms at hundreds and hundreds of temples. The scope of this booklet is to acquaint the devotees with basic information to put them on the right path only. It does not lay claim for all comprehensiveness of the subject to serve an authoritative treatise for reference. It is more or less a hand book with a little emphasis on the several aspects of Siva to showing the eternal charm of His cosmic form. Reference books are listed down under the Bibliography for full comprehension of the labour loving aspirants.

Now let us understand something about ‘Linga’ – Siva’s representation, the object of adoration seen in all Siva Alayas. As Siva is the personification of the supreme power of consciousness – mahachaitanya sakthi, permeating the cosmos. He is worshipped fittingly in the form of Linga, that resembles more or less a circle which has neither ‘aadi and anta’ – beginning or ending. Does that supreme infinite power possess any beginning or ending? It is adya nthra rahitamahasakthi. A little more probe reveals its full significance. Read...

II. LINGA PUJA

According to scriptures ‘lingam’ – phallus, a cylindrical form with rounded top, made of black granite mostly, is a combination of two words – ‘teemam and
gamtati. The first word means - the one that we do not know, and 'Gamtati', the second word stands for that, which explains the unknown. Put together, LINGAM signifies, the one that explains what is not known to us. It is equivalent to Parabrahman, the Ultimate Reality. It has another connotation; it is that which recreates the dissolved objects. Regarding the shape - the cylindrical, many points of view are advanced. One, the cosmological point of view is worth examining and it is logical too. According to it, God, the Absolute has no form, but He assumes forms only to help His devotees, and moreover He takes myriad forms to suit the occasion. The universe, His own creation - semi-spherical in shape, bounded by the circular horizon is resting on earth. The Linga with its semi-spherical top has a circular base, so it is the symbolic of universe. Yet, there is another interpretation and it is derived from two roots - hi and gam; - 'hi' means 'to issue', and 'gam' - 'to absorb'. So it is the source of evolution and involution. It is the source and goal of the universe. Needless to say, its powers are infinite. This drives home the truth, that Lord who is abiding in it, is the Supreme Reality, responsible for creation of the world - Jagatkaraka. In the Saivagamas, we come across references that Siva and Lingam are synonymous and they stand for Ultimate Reality. Furthermore, the Linga is symbolic of His both formlessness and form. As it has a particular shape, it is symbolic of form, and at the same time, it has neither head nor limbs like other images, so it is symbolic of formlessness.

Further, Siva is inseparably associated with Sakti, like moonlight with the Moon. So linga represents Siva and Sakti put together. They are also termed as Nada and Bindu. Philosophical explanation further goes to establish that the Bindu, the lower part acting as base is Sakti and the upper part is Nada standing for Siva. So all adoration naturally goes to both. He is the personification of consciousness, igniting the spark of life in all. If the affected prudery is hushed up, it means - the linga and yoni or Nada and Bindu are the symbols of the biological
act, instrumental for the creation of all the living creatures. Would there be any purer or higher symbols of the universal parents indispensable for reproducing life? Now learn about their kinds and merits. There are many kinds of lingas, such as Sunyalinga, Niskalalinga, Mahalinga, Istalinga etc. The Linga is above six kalas—Sashtakalatita. Incidentally, it symbolises another significant factor that the very same Lord is without any form definite; size fixed and features pleasant. As He is Omnipresent—occupying the cosmos, can He take any definite form? Being present to the brim in every object, He has no definite shape. But He is called Sakara also How? Don’t we see different objects taken individually, bearing different shapes? So He is sakara—having shape. That Absolute was without form in the beginning, but assumed it according to His own desire with a view to help His devotees; for, Parabrahman can be realised through the meditation on Saguna Brahman. To sum up—that Vedaswarupa Supreme Providence, embodiment of finite and infinite worlds—the characharaprashapanchaswarupa is instrumental for the creation, maintenance and dissolution of life, right from amoeba to the giant lizard as big as a hillock, say nearly ten times bigger than elephant, the biggest living creature of the animal kingdom. Should not then such august symbol become the fittest object of adoration? Would any substitute serve the purpose better? Does anything exist at all with such powers, attributes etc.?

And so worshipping that Highest HIM is a MUST in any manner one chooses—i.e. with manasa puja—metal worship, or bahya puja—worshipping with all paraphernalia. As the tattva of that indwelling Supreme Power is nirakara—formless and niravaya—limitless, the Linga represents this truth immanent and symbolises its inexplicable and indescribable eminence. Moreover, the sages propounded that the five elements—water, air, space, earth and fire visible to mortal eyes—rather perceptible by the five sensory organs are fittingly represented by the Linga with earth as altar—pootha; and sakasa as top etc., and it is the refuge of all gods. This is explained in the sloka—
"Ahamam lingam, ithyakam prthivi, tasya prsthah, Aakayah, sarvadevamaham hrayam lingam Vechyate".

Everything is abiding in it So it is appropriately called Linga. Offering worship to LINGA, representing, SIVA, SAKTI and all GODS dates from the pre-historic times and has formed the basic layer of religious life in India. Moreover, Siva is rated higher than all the gods. His popularity too is admirably greater. Scriptures with one voice proclaim this truth - the Linga. His symbol merits prostrations at mere sight. Staunch Vaishnavites claim and advance arguments similarly in favour of Vishnu, their Saviour, but they too accept that Siva dwells in the heart of Vishnu and Vishnu likewise stays in the heart of Siva - “Sivaasya hridayam Vishnu, Vishnur hridayam Siva”.

Though it establishes equality between them, Shiva as the Vedas affirm is superior to Vishnu.

Consideration of the kinds of linga demands attention.

### III. TYPES OF LINGA

This august linga is mostly made of salagram, but several other objects are also used, such as sonasila, arghakara and diamonds, in accordance with the traditions and spirit of the times, or taste of the adorers. And the gods they consider as their ashtadevatas. Adore the linga made of any material, represent it for any God you choose; install it in any place you like, its tattva remains the same - transcending time and taste. Linga though stands for Siva predominantly from the dawn of iconography, other deities are also represented by it, as exemplified by the Navabrahmas in the temple at Alampur. Here the nine lingas are installed representing the nine forms of the Presiding deity - Brahma, such as Bala Brahma, Kumara Brahma, Arka Brahma, Vira Brahma, Taraka Brahma, Garuda Brahma, Swarga Brahma, Padma Brahma. Mother Parasakti is worshipped in the form of Linga at some
places, like at Melmaruvathur in Tamil Nadu, along with her grand granite icon in Sukasana posture installed a little higher above the Swayambhulinga. Elsewhere, some other deities are represented as lingas and adoration is made thereto. So there seems no monopoly of one deity as such in representation of this God. Wherever you go throughout the length and breadth of India, you see Siva is worshipped in the Linga form only, perhaps to the exception of a very few places, where His most popular Nataraja form is worshipped as found in the famous temple at Chidambaram, and Ardhanareeswara form at some places like Tiruchengodu near Salem, Tamil Nadu etc. And perhaps the only place at Gudimallam near Tirupathi, Andhra Pradesh, where worship is offered to the image of the genital form of male reproductive organ. Very strange! A uniqueness that surprises the viewers by its appearance, size and shape. Another At Surutupalli near Nagalapuram in Andhra Pradesh, worship is offered to His recumbent posture. Could the taste of man ever reach the dead end? Would the arc of invention ever become a circle? Or can man confine the Omnipotence to one form only? So representation of deities in forms many and sizes countless do greet and overwhelm us by their queerness, freshness and unusualness. Bowing to them at their mere sight is the only right attitude that has to be cultivated and implemented irrespective of one's sect, creed etc. True devotion must rise above the pettiness of colour-glass-phobia. However, a glance at the materials used for making Siva lingas and the benefits they confer on the devotees is essential and it rewards the labours, since each material has its characteristic merit and satisfies the adorer of his particular desire or peculiar ego.

IV. MATERIALS FOR MAKING LINGA

Garuda purana lists down elaborately the different materials with which the Siva lingas are made and the
distinct type of blessings they confer, is for the devotee to make the object of worship accord to his need and taste, more than his inner elegance and refinement. Now look at the composition of each and know the merit it confers.

1. **GANDHA LINGA**: It is made of three ingredients—four parts of sandal paste, three parts of kumkumam and two parts of musk. Size determines the quantity and cost to be put in, but the ratio remains constant. If worship is made to that sandal paste linga, one gets blessed with Sivasayavamukti—merging of his jivatma into the Paramatma. Then the cycle of birth after death comes to end.

2. **PUSHPA LINGA**: This is made of various kinds of fresh, fragrant, multi-coloured pleasant flowers. It blesses the adorer with kingship and acquisition of lands.

3. **GOSAKRI LINGA**: It is made of the dung of a brown-coloured cow. The adorer will be blessed with wealth, if he worships that linga.

4. **VALUKA LINGA**: It is made of fine sand and the worship confers the status of Vidhyadhara belonging to one of the denominations of worshipful angels, besides Sivasayavaprapthi.

5. **YAVAGODHUMASALIJA LINGA**: It is made of rice, maize and wheat flour. And if adored, it confers santanaprapti in addition to wealth.

6. **SITAKHANDA LINGA**: It is made of sugar candy and blesses the adorer with robust health and disease-free peaceful life.

7. **LAVANA LINGA**: It is made of salt mixed with the powder of Hartal and Trikatukala. It blesses the adorer with Vasikaranasakti—the power that subdues others with the help of spells and charms.

8. **TILAPISTA LINGA**: It is made with the paste of gajah seeds. The desires of the adorer are fulfilled, if worshipped.
9. BHASMA LINGA: It is made of ash and confers all desirable merits.

10. GUDA LINGA OR SITA LINGA: It is made of jaggery or sugar and confers blissful life when adored.

11. VAMSANKURA LINGA: It is made of the tender leaves of bamboo, and confers a long line of genealogy.

12. PISHTA LINGA: It is made of rice flour and blesses the adorer with education.

13. DHADHDHUGDHA LINGA: It is made of milk and curd, on separating the entire quantity of water, and blesses the adorer with property and happiness.

14. DHANYA LINGA: It is made of grain and blesses bumper crops to the adorer.

15. PHALA LINGA: It is made of fruits and blesses the owner of orchards with good crops of fruits.

16. DHATRI LINGA: It is made of a kind of acid fruit - phyllanthus Emblica and bestows liberation.

17. NAVANITA LINGA: It is made of butter and confers fame and wealth.

18. DURVAKADAJA LINGA OR GARIKA LINGA: It is made of a kind of grass - agrostis linaries and saves the adorer from untimely or accidental death.

19. KARPURA LINGA: It is made of camphor and bestows emancipation.

20. AYASKANTA LINGA: It is made of magnet and confers siddhi - supernatural powers.

21. MOUKTIKA LINGA: It is made of the ashes obtained by burning pearls and confers auspiciousness and fortune.

22. SUVARNA LINGA: It is made of gold and confers mukti - deliverance of soul from body.
RAJITA LINGA  It is made of silver and confers fortune

PITTALA LINGA OR KAMSYA LINGA  It is made of an alloy of brass and bell metal and confers the release of soul from body

TRAPU LINGA  It is made of tagara metal and makes one's life free from enemies, if adored

AYASA LINGA  It is made of vitriol of sulphate and relieves one from the menace of enemies

SEESA LINGA  It is made of lead and makes the adorer invulnerable to foes

ASHTADHATU LINGA : It is made of minerals and bestows sarvasiddhi - all super natural powers

ASHTALOHA LINGA  It is made of eight metals and cures one of the leprous

VAIDURYA LINGA  It is made of a precious stone called Vaidurya laps and protects one from the enemys arrogant prattic

SPATIKA LINGA  It is made of crystal and bestows fulfillment of all desires

PADARA LINGA  It is made of mercury and bestows inestimable fortune

Although almost all materials are used to making of lingas certain materials are prohibited such as glass, iron, raktachandana, copper and conch. This banning is enforced only in Kaliyuga, and not applicable to the other yugas. Importantly, the merit of worshipping lingas does not confine to Siva alone it goes to many such as Mother Parvathi. His inseparable spouse. Moreover, it is said that as Brahma abides at the bottom portion of linga Vishnu in the middle portion and finally Siva at the top, adoration brings merit from them also. Doesn't adoration bring them manifold blessings? In consequence, its significance is infinite, and merit abundant.

There are several types of worship. A glance at them is a necessity.
V. SIVAPARTHIVOPASANA

In addition to offering worship to the lingas of different kinds enumerated above, and visiting almost all the Srivakshetras of eternal importance, like the Jyotirlinga shrines, Panchabhutassthala temples, Pancharama gsalayas, ardent devotees make Sivalinga with pure soil in the traditional method and offer ritualistic worship. It is called Sivaparthivopasana. This confers the fulfilment of every adorable desire worthy of craving, and untainted by sin. Yet, there are some more ways of worship meriting mention at this stage.

VI. SIVABANOPASANA

The emergence of this type of worship has a fascinating background and reflects Siva's Omnicompassion, which knows no equal and timeless also. It is recorded in the Puranas that the valorous Banasura, son of that formidable demon Bah, who ruled over the three worlds, did penance on the bank of river Narmada for centuries. When Siva was pleased with his long penance, appearing before him asked to name his desire for instant granting. Being a fervent worshipper, and desiring to see Him always, in some form for the other atleast, he asked Him to give darshan in the river and the nearby mountain Always. Would that satrIpakshapatha -- partial to devotees said 'no' Certainly Never. He said then Amen! Accordingly He got converted Himself into unaccountable Sivalingas instantly. They are fittingly called Banalingas. This oddity has given rise to a popular adage – Narmada ke kankar subsankar – all the stones of Narmada are images of Sankara. So offering worship to any one of them tantamounts to worshipping the Lord. Bana not only enjoyed the sight of his ishtadaiva, but became means of conferring
the fortune of offering prayers to Siva abiding in those stones by the passionate Saivites, who bring those Banalingas and worship in their houses, with a procedure odd Hail Bana hail’

Before bringing that adorable Bana linga, devotees adapt an ingenious method of selection of the right kind of linga from the stones found in abundance, both on the hill and in the river, resembling Siva lingas. After making a search for long although all are adorable, they subject the linga to test—they weigh it first against rice. Later, again they weigh the weighed rice against the linga in the changed pane. A second time if there were to be a negligible wee bit difference—say a little more it is deemed fit for house holders and if it is less it is earmarked for recluses—sanyasis. Incidentally the linga that remains same when weighed without undergoing change, is found unfit and called non Banalinga. True Bana Linga fit for worship must have some difference, however insignificant it might be. Then they bring it for daily worship. Worship made at home by instigating it with rituals as embodied in Saivagamas. This practice is observed by the saint Saivites even today. Strange are the legends and stranger still is the belief, and the strangest it is that such worship elevates the devotees and confers solace abundantly. That is India. And the Indianess in its pristine purity is manifesting even today in the orthodox families to the embarrassment of agnostics.

VII. SIVALINGOPASANA

Equating linga with that Omnipresent Siva and offering prayer services to it, like archana, abhisheka, harati etc apart from the elaborate shodasopachara is very common since yugas. And it is the tradition honoured, and a heritage adored with mute consent. Its antiquity is rooted in the Vedas. It was widespread not only in India but in far off alien countries. History dumps evidence through iconography, and calligraphy too that made use of
symbols when writing had not attained perfection. The lingas of different sizes and shapes installed in temples at the instance of sages and gods are found throughout Bharatkhanda, as evidenced by the existence of Snow linga in Amarnath cave in the Himalayas, and Tirukkonamalai in Trincomalee, lying at the eastern coast of Srilanka, the boundaries of North and South and at Prabhasa Pattana in Gujarat and Bali in Java, the West and East ends. At some other places too Swayambhu lingas are worshipped ardently, realising the sacrosanct history of the place due to visitation of celestials, or the sacredness of habitation of hermits.

This accounts for the emergence of the Jyotirlingas, Ashtamurtilingas, Panchabhatasthalas and Pancharamas. They are found atop the high snowy hills; down below in the lovely dales; on the banks of rivers; in the hearts of forests; amidst rivers and in the dark caverns of long caves. Visit any inhabited area – city, town or hamlet, you will come across atleast one Sivalinga, either in well-built magnificent temple, or placed on a dias in the open, shaded by trees in the least. It is no exaggeration, if proclaimed that the number of Sivaalayas outnumber all the other temples of all the gods put together. It is neither a poetic fancy, nor a concocted news item. The reason too is not far to seek. Normally the linga widely worshipped is made of granite, is found in abundance everywhere in India, and moreover it alone can withstand the onslaughts of weather, nor the sculptors of Visvakarma calibre are needed for making it. Above all, Siva is accessible to unostentatious worship only. He demands not elaborate paraphernalia of worshipping material. Isn't He only one among the divinities – simple and unostentatious, and above all more lovable and most generous in granting boons to the utmost satisfaction of the Sadhakas? This accounts for the ecstatic craze of the devotees to install Sivalingas in every place and at any corner. Hence the emergence of the oft-quoted statement – Sarvam Sivamayam Jagat – the whole world is filled with Siva. Is He not abiding in every object? Howelse the objects assume their shape, size, smell, sound, motion, consciousness etc., if not due
to the immanence of this Supreme Deity. His presence in them can be felt, if seen through the inner eye with unbaressed mind and unperturbed pure heart. Evolved souls realised HIM thus. He is instilling devotion in the minds by His Omnipresence. By His divine Omnibenevolence, He makes His bhaktas to come to Him and lead a life of beatitude.

Alas' the perverted man, by his earth and earthy mean, detestable, arrogant, egotistic nature, manifesting in devil greed and demon jealousy, is poisoning the elements and polluting the environs by creating barriers among his own species and dividing them into innumerable sects, parties, groups, sanghas etc., through the wicked manoeuvres of the all destroying and disastrous evil powers of politics and atheism. But for this, man would not have lost his paradise, nor does he get subjected to miseries of the cycle of births and deaths. Though he is seeing the divine presence, peeping through every object around him, and hearing its pulse in every sound, he is still keeping himself away from the righteous path. Is this not the direct outcome of his non-chalance and disobedience to the heavenly injunctions and scriptural canons? What then is the way out to obtain atleast Sabakurnmukti — living in the Sivaloka, leaving alone the other most covetable muktas, like Sarupya mukti: taking the same form as that of Siva, Sannidhya mukti: living at close quarters of the Lord, and Sayuja mukti — merging in Him, the Highest of all, since it alone releases him from further births in this sin-ridden treacherous world? The only course prescribed is devotion, simple and pure for mankind in this Kalyugha, though yagna, yaga, penance, severe austerities etc. were prescribed in the other three preceding yugas — Krita, Treta and Dwaparayuga.

Even this devotion too can be practised, and the object fulfilled through several ways Bhakti can be expressed in as many as eight ways — such as namajapa, satsanga, kahetradarsana, amarana etc. Out of these kahetradarsan — which means making pilgrimage to holy thirth kahetsra confers manifold blessings and lifts the souls magnificently and instantly too. For, the Omniscient spirit.
is permeating that entire place due to acts of consecration by the high souled and divinities. The humanist sages who installed the icons transferred their tapasakti into them and breathed spirituality there. The divine vibrations emanating from them have such alchemic touch, the sins take to heels, if visitation is made. And worshipping by staying a few minutes too imparts godliness. The impetus obtained lasts longer and yields greater benefits. Among the eight, Sivasakaropasana is common and preferable. Read and realise its import.

**VIII. SIVASAKAROPASANA**

Highly evolved souls among mankind practice Nirakara, nirgunapuja — formless and attributeless puja, realising that Siva is pervading the whole universe, and so they prefer not any icon for adoration, nor do they take into cognisance of any trait — attribute of the Supreme Reality, popularly familiar as saanthagunasampanna, or roudraguna bhushana. They practise Nirgunopasana, deeming the Lord above attributes. But, for the benefit of common man, some sort of name with certain attributes, and a definite form — Sagunopasana and Sakarapuja are prescribed by the scriptures. If a distinct form or certain name or definite attribute is given to the Providence, it facilitates the devotee to concentrate on the image and repeat the name. And to imitate and emulate that attribute too. This brought into existence the innumerable forms, names and attributes to God. With the gradual development of devotion, the bhaktas themselves realise the supremacy of nirakara, nirgunopasana and switch over to it consciously and commendably without harming, or creating impediments to those who are at the lower rung of evolution.

It is certainly inhuman, unnatural, illegal, irreligious and unethical to show disfavour to those, who practice Sakaropasana and Sagunopuja. If the devil jealousy raises its head to despise, criticise, repudiate and differ from those, who choose to worship their own iahtadaivams according
to their preference and psychology, it has to be curbed ruthlessly and instantly. In as much as a certain individual is adoring a deity of his choice, though diametrically opposite and totally repugnant to the other man’s attitude, he too has every right to see his interests safeguarded and preserved with the might of fist or power of tongue. Man being a social animal, he must learn the art of living amicably and harmoniously, despite the infinite diversity and omnipresent discordance staring into eyes at every turn. And every second too Toleration is the hallmark of refinement, and a virtue ever commendable. It divinises not only the owner but his formidable foe, who mercilessly raises his cudgel to smash him to fragments. Scriptures of every religion preach this virtue and proclaim vociferously that admission into Lord’s abode is reserved for only such supreme specimens of mankind, whose altruism and tolerance entitles the highest place and God’s best mercy. What are the forms and what is their significance? Need enlightenment now.

IX. SIVA PANCHAMURTHYOPASANA

This is given elaborate treatment as the Siva purana Lingopasana is quite common and widely practised everywhere by literates, semi and illiterates, with or without paraphernalia, elaborate And the merit that accrues depends upon the nature of commitment; certainly the blessings conferred are in proportion to the devotion expressed. There is another type of upasana called Sivapanchamurthyopasana and it demands chanting of mantras and following a set procedure. Mostly, the priests, well-versed in the Agamastrastras perform this puja at the behest of the devotees in temples normally. This, of course comes next to the popular Lingopasana in importance. It confers greater merit, and the performance too is extraordinary, considering the materials used and procedure followed. Let us observe the mode of doing it.

At the outset, it presupposes and affirms that Siva has five distinct and different faces called Sadyojata,
Vasudeva, Aghora, Tatpurusha and Isana. And each one faces a direction—viz the Sadyojatamukha faces East; Vasudeva, South; Aghora, West; Thatpurusha, North and Isana, Skywards. These five faces are highly adorable and their import is mystic too. They have distinct qualities. Isanamukha radiates vilasa—jubilant sportive spirit; Thatpurushamukha is tapomaya—meditative in nature; Aghora Mukha is samharaka—stands for destruction. Vasudevamukha symbolises Ahankara—arrogance, and Sadyojayamukha is jnanamaya, and so reflects knowledge. They have five distinct mantras, one each and when offering prayers, relevant mantras alone have to be chanted. But each invariably brings out its own special quality and eulogises it fittingly. Offering prayers, needless to say blesses the devotee with that quality which is invoked and prayed for. They fulfil the desires of the individual adorers according to their nature. Elaborate procedure with numerous rituals are observed in some others, like shodasopachara puja. Devout attention confers enlightenment and performance brings merit. So read.

**X. FORMS OF SIVA**

The humanist sage-seers invested the Supreme Being with several forms. Some presented that Highest HIM in a magnificent form draped in dazzling outfit and bewitching jewellery. Many others in sublime form in supreme simplicity. All for catering to the taste of the adoring man and please his ego. As no two persons share sameness—internal or external, no imposition is practisable, nor does it last longer. Presenting God, the Providence in several forms with a wide variety of adornments, seems to be the chief motive of the sage-seers. It evidently resulted in greater good to the greatest number of adorers. Hence we are seeing Siva possessing with Jatajuta—matted locks; svetarupa—white complexion; bhasmadharendrah—ash—smeared body; trinetra—a third eye in the middle of the forehead; chaturbhuja—four hands; krishnajana dharana—
draped in the hide of black antelope together with 
gajacharmra - elephant's skin And holding in his hands, 
trisula - trident, dhamaru - drum shaped weapon so on 
and so forth, together with using Nandi-bull as his vehicle. 
They have given him several names, the chief and common 
being Eswara, Rudra, Sarva Mruda, Pasupathi, Sitikantaka, 
Parvathupathi, Sooli, in addition to Sahasranamas visualising 
His whole swarupa for satisfactory grasp of the adorers. 
Yet, certain rishis gave Him the other names such as 
Vishnu, Lakshminatha, Pundarikaksha, Janardhana, Naryana 
etc besides the Sahasranamas And embellished His white 
complexioned body with a majestic crown, Keyurahara - 
necklace and chain, together with four hands, holding sanku, 
chakra, gada, padma - conch, disc, club and lotus, and 
made Garuda his vehicle Moreover, He is given the names 
such as Surya, Subrahmanya, the male forms, and 
Lakshmi, Saraswathi, Parvathi, Mahatiripuraasundari, Bala, 
Rajarajeswari, the female forms of high divinities

Strangely enough, to heighten the importance of a 
perticular form of the deity, one is adorning, odd and 
interesting stories are invented, episodes woven, anecdotes 
conceived and tense situations, fabricated Their chief concern 
is to impress the devotee with the truth, that true bhakti 
would inevitably bear fruit and the adorer be emancipated. 
It is only through comparison, and more so with contrast - 
the principal forms of rhetorics, any point can be driven 
home easily and successfully by the writers So the 
scriptural literature left no means untapped through its 
genre to make man realise the Omnipotency of God, and 
with His mercy alone man will be lifted

Ironical it appears, that man consciously disregarding 
the humanist intention of the sages and noble-minded 
kavyakarthas, has become a great danger to society not 
realising that his very thoughts and actions create such a 
terrible catastrophe, from which he too cannot extricate 
himself. Has not his crooked nature turned the 
Nandanavanas into sand dunes and cities teeming with 
millions into burial grounds? Has not his own black nature 
rought untold misery to his own self in the end? It is 
only by viewing the injunctions in the right perspective
and changing his decayed self, he can live in harmony with nature, others and himself. First and last.

Even in the Ekarupopasana, several sects and factions, denominations and schools have sprung up and split mankind into abominable groups and classes. Although they are worshipping the one and the same Supreme Reality, they have either out of narrow outlook, or superiority complex, started making divisions and tried or trying to glorify their own sect. It is not a healthy sign, nor is it in harmony with the aspiration of the sage-seers. Egoism and 'mine-thine' considerations definitely have cut asunder the solidarity of the community. Did ever divergency, disparity, incompatibility and dissension lead but to goal? It is pity that man realises late, by then the inevitable conflagration visits and leaves all in ashes.

Yet, many types of Vupasanās in one and the same Sivopasana have come to stay and are carrying on their activities. Among them -- Panchamurti Vupasana, Ashtamurti Vupasana, Jyotirlingopasana, Sadasiva Vupasana, Mritunjaya Vupasana, Ardhanareswaropasana, Dhakshinamurthyupasana are only a few, the major ones now prevalent. Some of them by their broad outlook are advocating worship in harmony with other sects, a few are expressing contradictions in subtle ways through muffled voices. Leaving them to their own fancy, let us study some of the main forms of worship.

**XI. MODES OF SIVA PUJA**

**Lingodbhava Puja**

Special pujas have to be offered at certain days of the year, deemed very auspicious to receiving full benefit. Among them Lingodbhava puja is one. The second being the day of swallowing Halahalam. The date and exact time of Lingodbhava has been specifically mentioned in books and so devotees await it on the tip toe of expectation.
This propitious time occurs on the Chaturdashi of the dark fortnight of Maghamaas, and at the evening of first Monday of Shravanamaas. These two are the most auspicious, and performing Siva puja then confers unlimited bene. Devotees can perform this in their houses itself, and it is not obligatory to go to Sivanayana. One thing it demands is - steadfastness and single-minded devotion. Further, this can be performed either with the guidance of priests, or by devotees themselves, if they are familiar with the procedure to be adopted.

Lingadibhava Puja

Fortunately, this season is quite congenial for celebration of this annual festival. It is at this time, Nature sets up an exquisite background for its performance. The tranquility it reigns supreme due to the passing of harvest season enables all - farmers, labourers, officials etc, to celebrate it with utmost zest. And as the rainy season being past, the azure sky looks lovely and colourful as the mild rays of the Sun caress them with tenderness. The biting breeze enkindles sublime thoughts charged with devotion and serenity. Severity of anything is totally conspicuous by its absence. In this salubrious air, devoid of the excesses of heat or cold, people feel like taking the pleasure of Jagarana - keeping awake the whole night and spending in congregational bhajan, or listening to Sivalilas expounded through kalakshetras or speeches. Fasting on this day brings enviable merits.

Background

During then, Nature seems conscious of auspiciousness of the time, appears in its full splendour. It was at this time once the Omniscient Omnipresent Bhagavan descended to adjudge a dispute that arose between Brahma and Vishnu. The legend illustrates us with its oddity, better say, with the littleness of the mighty Gods. According to legend, there arose a difference of opinion in the hymns one of time, about the superiority of the Supreme God - - Vishnu and Brahma - who between the two was superior to the other? Both laid their claims without number and
argued vehemently. As the argument mounted higher and higher in gravity, the heat that was generated travelled fast to Kailas. Wondering at the nature of dispute and its tension, Lord Siva descended in the form of an effulgent pillar of light that had neither bottom nor top. The contestants realising that it was no other than Siva in that august shape, referred their case to Him. Smilingly, Siva said that he who comes first touching either the adi-bottom or theanta-top is superior over the other. Forthwith, Vishnu taking the form of primal boar started digging the earth to reach the bottom. Finding it impossible, he turned up accepting his inability. Meanwhile, Brahma sitting on His vehicle swan flew up and returned saying that he had touched the top, and for evidence he produced a ketaki flower which nodded its head to honour the word given to Brahma when met Him mid-way. Lord Siva — the Omniscient GOD cursed Brahma for lying, and Ketaki, abetting the unjust action.

This happened on the midnight of Maghabahula chaturthi and Siva’s avatarama — descent on that auspicious moment was named Lingodbhava punyakala. Since then special pujas are offered to Siva, and if fasting — vupaava and waking up — jagarana throughout the night are observed on that day with namajapa, one attains emancipation. Ardent devotees neither eat nor drink even a drop of water. Why, even swallowing saliva is prohibited, which according Agamas tantamounts to drinking water. They scrupulously adhere to all the injunctions and feel that their life attained charitartha.

Halabalam Episode

In addition, it is on the evening of the first Monday of Sravanamasaa, Lord Siva swallowed the kalakutavisaha, that came up when palasamudra was churned, to save the worlds from the conflagration. So these monumental occasions are occupying the highest place in the Saivite calendar, nay in the almanac of humanity. This Lingodbhava auspicious moment, if remembered showers manifold blessings on the adorsa. Even a drop of water poured on the Sivalinga at this moment as an act abhisheaka, it fetches
fortune. Prayer services of numerous kinds have been introduced to benefit mankind, if performed with due fervour then.

The Maasivaratri also have similar potentialities and confer benefits equally, however, the annual celebrations outweigh the monthly ones. The well-known and widely practised fasting and waking up the whole night, vupavasa and jagarana are eagerly awaited and fervently observed by all classes of people transcending creeds and sects that demarcate the devotional community into fragments innumerable. This incidentally reflects the recognition of the sacredness of the moment and expressing gratitude to Siva for the mahakarya of saving mankind from extinction of life, and annihilation of all that then living, besides His adjudication of the case. Siva is Siva, none else stands fit to be compared with His Omnibenevolence. If only one spends the whole night even with listening to the Siva lila specially broadcast through media, leave alone spending money for the performance of pujas, he entitles mukti and the Lord's anugrah. So pious men waste not, procrastinate not, nor let that occasion slip from their grasp for peaceful existence during their sojourn in this material world and bliss there in the spiritual world after that.

Sivabhishakam

The ritualistic worship has many forms. Though agamas prescribed a set pattern for everyone certain variations are found due to climatic conditions and regional variations. Among the several kinds of Prayer Services offered to the archamuthis, abhishekam has a special significance and it is offered for deriving benefits of many types. Abhishekam means the bathing ritual of the icon to the chanting of special hymns as enjoined in the Agamanaratanam. First, the idol is anointed with oil, or some other material and then bathed in special water. It consumes a lot of time and money, and hence the administrative authorities of temples charge sums ranging from tens to hundreds, depending upon the nature of place and fame of the deity. There are multitudinous kinds of abhishekams;
as many as 32, such as Kaheerabhishekam, Chandanabhishekam, Panchamritabhishekam, Panakabhishekam, Ikshurasabhishekam, Pannerabhishekam, Pushpodabhishekam etc. Each has a special effect and confers a distinct merit on the abhishekadars. In some temples advance booking is essential, and devotees wait for months and years to get their chance after paying the amount. Scriptures elaborated their benefits in such terms that ardent devotees visit the temples to witness the elaborate ritualistic offerings made to the chanting of mantras etc. Normally, at the end the prasad is distributed to the devotees who receive it with infinite satisfaction, deeming it as a God-sent great fortune. The archamurtis too exercise their whims and fancies with regard to this performance as it were; for, some archamurthis are contented with only a simple type of abhishek, and if it is offered, they bless the sevathis munificently. A few examples bring home the truth and their efficacy.

The Dandayudhapani temple is noted for the offering of Panchamritebhishek to the Moolavar - Muruga. Though there are others entailing less expenditure and time saving also, the devotees offer only this, spending hundreds. And on this august occasion, their entire family along with kith and kin visit to partake the blessings. On successful completion, they heave long sighs of relief, indicating their inner satisfaction, reflecting the confidence they have gained to face the challenges. And feel that their bodies are anointed with nectar making them invulnerable. Well, belief gives relief and fuels the machine to run smooth and cover miles more with divine power than the actual fuel power, they aver. God in His infinite mercy devises schemes infinite to turn the bhaktas more righteous by spending a few hours in His sannidhi, listening to His glories. Yet, man maintaining status quo - selfish pursuits, sinful manoeuvres etc. etc. etc. continues ..... They will not be totally subdued. Can the dog's tail be straightened over?

Siva's Preference

Lord Siva has a special preference, it seems for Abhisheka offerings. And He confers or rather rains
blessings on the seventh day disproportionate to the zeal and involvement expressed in offering this abhisheka service. Devout bhaktas offer this service to HIM on days auspicious and feel crossed the oceans on its satisfactory completion. As the benefits one receives are out of proportion to the efforts and money spent, the craze for offering, needless to mention reaches the peaks. Definite result is sighted even at mere decision, much less - at the meeting of proposals. Hence Siva acquired an epithet honourable and title covetable one – ‘Abhisheka Priyah Sivah’. He is extremely fond of bathing Himself with various objects, such as Panchamrit, ikshurana, gandhodbhaka, akshatodaka, rudrakshodaka, phalodaka, pushpopadaka, durvadaka etc. In all these water is used plentifully and He prefers it too. He experiences a cooling sensation when the water saturated with cooling materials is poured over His entire body. His option for this and craze for continuous pouring is justified on many grounds. And when pleased with that ritual, His conferring of boons naturally turns bounteous and generous. Profusion is undoubtedly more than the expected.

A little probe divulges the truth of His preference. Having swallowed the most lethal poison with shooting tongues of fire - the all consuming conflagration, emerged during the churning of the ksheerasamagama, His inside is inevitably sooting with unbearable blazing heat, and is surging through every pore of His body. So, when the cool, soothing water touches His skin, He feels a freezing cool sensation enveloping as it were. That mood confers blessings out of proportion. Natural ! Moreover, He is layakara - snapping the bonds tying mankind to this sin-ridden world. That office calls forth certain amount of harshness coupled with ruggedness and compassionlessness. So inevitably He wears the aspect of Vajra too. Look ! His effervescent harshness is not cooled, eventhough by living surround by the freezing icy peaks. Does His choice mirror any indiscretion ? Or does it indicates His lack of the Samyaga ? Neither luxury nor frivolousness ever peep through this. He is, by and large, the standing specimen of simplicity and unenchantment.
The abhisheka of any type must be offered with the recitation of Rudradhayamanttra for full benefit. Done so, bestow attitude seeks and stays with the sevthrti. Do it at once and get the benefit forthwith. Another factor now demands attention and implementation. According to scriptural canons, the entitlement of benefit is restricted only to those who are Rudras. If the sevthrti is not Rudra and does not possess that virtue, he must be rest contented to give up the hope of getting any merit. But the Vedic sages have made certain provisions to make the desiring desist to avail the benefit, though the sastras unmistakably enunciated – Na Vishnurvishnur marchayet – na rudro rudra marchayet – "If one is not a Vaishnava, he cannot worship Vishnu, and likewise if one is not Saiva, he cannot worship Siva. They laid down a procedure to make man Siva or Vishnu by following a certain procedure. If the sevthrti wears on his forehead Tripundraamam, he becomes Vaishnava, and ash marks similarly makes him Saiva. So, by putting on the ash marks along with wearing of Rudraksha mala, he can offer abhisheka to Lord Siva.

Putting on those and chanting certain mantras like Mahanyasa and Laghuunyasa, anyone can perform the abhisheka ritual. If these are followed scrupulously, Siva feels pleased immensely and grants boon to the satisfaction of the devotees.

SHODASOPACHARA SIVAPUJA

INTRODUCTION

Seivagamas have prescribed certain rituals and hymns for offering worship to Siva. Elaborate procedure is to be followed for gaining full merit. Besides regular prayer services, like harati – waving of the burning camphor before the deity; archana – chanting relevant names, and abhishek – bathing the deity with several materials like milk, curd, honey, panner, ash, panchamrits, etc., there is Shodashopachara puja which is a complicated and time consuming
procedure. This service is offered to the archa murtis — icons regularly in all temples — Siva, Vaishnava or Saketya, though performance of rituals vary. Many materials — pujadrayya are necessary and have to be kept ready before the commencement itself. As and earlier for Svapuja, the person performing pujya must make himself Siva, then only he is entitled to begin. This can be done by wearing ash marks on the forehead and Rudrakshamala over the neck. And chanting of Laghubunyasa or Mahanyasa hymns too. When armed with them, he becomes Rudra and can start following scrupulously the prescribed procedure ordained

Procedure

To begin with, Ganaapathy is to be invoked first along with Kalasaapya — worship of a brass vessel filled with water and mango leaves. Mahanyasa or Laghubunyasa hymns have to be invariably chanted; and after that thrice chanted water is to be sipped. The chanting of these hymns ensure the worshipper becoming Siva and in seeing Siva in the image placed before him. Svedasapamaan means sixteen different type of services offered to the Lord. Of the sixteen, the first Vupachara is avahana — invoking Siva with the prescribed hymn.

It means inviting Siva to come. When done soulfully, Lord Siva comes to receive the worship.

Now follows the other Vupacharas one after another like.

ABANAA

Arudhita manum thuch tenam anudhthakam devamurudhthakam
Arudhayaand Sthriyastram man githana Mahamanava
Deena anudhthayam.

AVARANA

Offering of seat to Siva. The hymn for this is

Trupasamantagayamagayanagayamamaranam
Vaswanthamane kaalanieka rudhyarunyakshayya Manvantar.

PADA

Offering of water for washing His feet then —
Oṃ Saṃjñāyatana Pradāpayo Saṃjñāyatana Yami namo namo

ARKHYA

Giving water scented, or flowers soaked in it for washing the mouth, given with conch to the chanting of hymn —

Oṃ Bhūme Bhūme naḥ Bhūme, bhūmevaḥ-bhupena

ACHAMAN

Giving water of special kind i.e. sweetened water by the addition of madhuparka — which is made of milk, curd, honey, ghee and sugar chanting the sloka —

Oṃ Vasudevaya nāmaḥ (namaka chamaka hymna)

SNANA

This is an elaborate ritual performed with different materials depending upon time, e.g. only plain water for morning service, where as in the afternoon, Panchmrita snana, i.e. water mixed with milk, ghee, curds, honey and sugar. Perfumed water is used at the end with the chanting of slokas —

Oṃ Vasudevaya nāmaḥ and also namaka chamaka hymna

VASTRAN

Draping the image with garments and yagnopavita with chanting of sloka — Oṃ Jēśṭhyānāmāh (costly costumes are used for special occasions).

ABHARAN

Decorating the deity with jewels to the chanting of the sloka ‘Oṃ Kāmaprayānāmāh’.

GANDEMA

Offering of perfume — sandal paste or musk with the sloka ‘Oṃ Kālepyāmāmāh’.
AKSHAT
Sprinkling of unbroken rice made yellow with saffron, chanting the sloka ‘Om Kaleshvaranayanamah’.

PILALAPATRAPUREPA, SELVA LEAVES
Worshipping HIM with flowers and bilva leaves with chanting — ‘Om Kaleshvaranayanamah’.

DASA
Wave offering of lighted lamp with wicks chanting the sloka.

NAIVEDYA
Offering of the cooked food and edibles, like fruits with the sloka ‘Om Sverse Manasahyanamah’.

TAMBULA
Offering betel leaf and arecanut with the sloka
‘Om Manasanayanamah’
Presentation of gifts follows depending upon monetary status of the performer.

NIRAJAN
Wave offering with camphor — arati is the last ritual and it brings an end to the session. This is the normal way of performing prayer services to the deities in almost all temples and at homes also.

In temples, normally music is played during the performance. In the end chanting of this hymn is observed

Om Samah Samasiddhiyunan Anavah Samvachanta
Bhrumadihigaman Bhrumamangata Brahman
Shreer Atma Brabakham

These namaskara chamakas describe the Omipresence of Siva and they bless the performer with fulfillment of desires. In the end the performer must pray that there should be no place in him for hatred, jealousy, greed, etc.
Moreover, he should end with the sloka which means that whatever he does should become the worship to HIM, i.e. only good acts must emerge from him.

Atmanam Chi-ramath Saahasarah Pranamah Sarvamah grhah
Pujato Kasyampe bhagavahan mridvaamodhah athith
Sancharuh Padayuh Pradbahuna Vidhih utnamah Sarvagiranah
Vediyat Karmahamad hasttamahdam Sancho tanvaar흔nem

Mere performance of offerings and chanting will never bring any fruit, nor could the world honour the performer; it is only with total involvement and utmost sincerity, the performer can expect blessings, provided he should implement in his dealings all the commandments enshrined in the hymns he chanted. He should endeavour earnestly to realise the truth of the dictum — live and let live. His egotism should be subordinated to the divine altruism which is possible only when living honestly and selflessly without hindrance to others' living. And with that also the arc does not become circle, though it may near the other end. He should strive to extend his helping hand for others to rise and live, prosper and practise the same ideal, which he chose for his existence. By the way, isn't he putting into practise of the Biblical saying — 'Do to others what you expect others to do for you? Sure then, the much coveted peace and plenty return to make the world equal to heaven — the blissful world and fulfil the ideal of ideals of Hinduism — the quintessence of the Vedas — 'Sarve Samastha Sanmangali bhavantu' — welfare of all in the cosmos. Thereby you not only recognise the existence of God in all around you, but extend reverence to each object, since Siva is abiding and permeating in all — Sarvam Sivamayam Jagat. Aren't you worshipping God soulfully then? Does anything remain to be wished for?

More than this ritualistic worship, there are others that confer merit. Visiting of those holy places, where SIVA is manifesting tantamounts to offering of prayers. Where they are and what are its special merits are discussed below. Read ........
Festivals and Timings

There are certain special and auspicious times during the year, earmarked for celebrating festivals. Mondays, Maasamavatria, Mahasivaratri, Karthika masaas and Sravana massaas are very propitious for worshipping Siva. Sivopasana practised on these occasions brings forth meritorious result and solace that makes life worth living. Any souful puja offered goes to HIM, and from HIM comes contentment, solace, success, galloping to overwhelm the performer. Perhaps, none can bar his progress nor mar his career then. In Bhavishottara stotra, this is given ample space and it explains in detail, the relevant procedure and its merits too.

XII. PRINCIPAL NAMES OF SIVA

As Linga, an inanimate material object is used for representing Siva and symbolising His cosmic form and infinite power, sound also represents His form, power etc. The numberless number of names coined and created with the mental power and poetic fancy visualise elaborately His Visvarupa and impresses the listeners and readers with His immanent glory and evanescent form. In the preliminary part of the sacred Vedas, He is equated with Pranava, the Primordial energy, as "Tasya vachakah pranavah". He is the very same pranava AUM; just as Siva stands represented by this, the list of the names is not complete, nor does it reveal His multi-faceted personality. Very many names pregnant with rich meaning and appropriate connotation are coined by the saint-seers to capture His myriad energy and its infinite forms, but they only neared the far end of His rainbow splendour but never touched it. For, nearer they approached, farther it went. Names such as Bhava, Rudra, Mruda, Sarva, Isa, Vishnu, Ganesh, Mahesa, Paramesa etc., are a few only, and each is representing one aspect definite and one facet complete. Hundreds of such names are multiplied, time and again to the extent of resulting factor crossing.
thousands. To know the connotations and realise its glory is also a type of vupasana and it elevates man, who zealously tries it, since the comprehension, or grasp ends in recognition of one facet at least and its impact naturally draws him nearer to that great HIM.

First, let us take the word - SIVA. If it is split up, we see three parts -- first 'IS' which means delight, welfare, happiness, auspiciousness mainly; T represents the created beings and 'VAH' stands for one who blesses or grants auspiciousness. Put together it refers to one, who grants happiness to the jivaraasi. Next is 'Vishnu' and means thereby one who is present everywhere; Sarvah stands for one, who destroys everything during kalpantha or pralaya; Ganesa means the Lord of Pramadaganaas -- a class of servants attending on Siva; ISA stands for one who appoints and maintains. And superior to others. All the other suffixes, like Jagat, Para, Maha, Lokâ, represent a particular aspect and its a position; para stands for one who is the most superior, and lords over the TRIO, being the cause of them. It further means the protector, creator, destroyer, besides the personification of TRUTH. All derive from AUM, which is His first name enshrined in the Vedas.

XIII. SIVA MAHIMA

And these names - Bhava, Hara, Mruda and Siva represent the qualities He posses for creating, maintaining and destroying the worlds. When He possesses or takes upon Himself that aspect or Rajoguna, while creating the worlds, He is called bhaveh or Brahma; for dissolution of the world, He possesses Tamoguna' then is called layakara and finally for protecting and maintaining the worlds, He possesses sattvaguna and called then Mruda. As He is above all gunas, He is called Siva, the Parabrahma.
XIV. SIVASHTA MURTIS

INTRODUCTION

Living creatures are made of Prakriti, as is scriptural truth. They are distinguished by movement, growth and decay, and so are different from inanimate objects. They belong to both plant and animal kingdoms. Though possessing life and potentialities, they lack powers of expression, faculties of thinking and discrimination. It is man and man alone is gifted with rationality, manifested in thinking, feeling, speaking and reacting to circumstances that establishes his superiority over the entire creation, and so deemed to be the crown of creation. And moreover, he is created in the form of God, the Almighty. He is like Him in form, size and mental activity; yet he is not like Him in powers inherent and actions manifest, though emerging from that infinite energy enshrined in the Highest Providence. God in His boundless mercy blessed man with opportunities to evolve and rise to His level. Well, there are certain individuals, who by their Soul power surpassed God, in certain aspects only. God overjoyed at that spectacular demonstration of soul power and blessed them suitably, or fulfilled their desires on occasions many.

Mythologies are replete with episodes, where men ascribed the dominion of Heaven, who are invested with certain super human powers to act and assist HIM in discharging several functions. These divine individuals, living in close proximity with God serve Him at His back and call. They never outgrow that greatest HIM, despite possessing extraordinary powers and enjoying special privileges over and above man in comparison. So God, the Providence presides over all His created objects – animate and inanimate. Each object rather creature has its individual soul, a distinct body, a form and a size, just as the Lord has His body etc., but it is the collective one, embodying in itself all the created including worlds that hold the created. It is that infinitely enormous, immensely abundant, omniscient unsurpassing, intensely mighty, absolutely overpowering, immensely supreme form that goes by the name of Paramatma. He is above and over all in the cosmos. Has not the cosmos emerged at His pleasure and dissolved too at His will, and they get recreated and stay on at His will?
Strange it sounds that this Supreme HE has eight such august forms. They alone are responsible to prove His existence and glorify His infinitude. What are they? They are no other than the Earth, Water, Air, Fire and Ether, the five elements and to add to these, the Moon, representing the collective mind, the Sun representing the collective Vijnana and finally Shanks - collective arrogance, born of performing all beneficent yagna -- samisti satkarma yagnahankara. Though Siva is invisible, these eight murthis are partly visible to the mortal eyes but totally perceptible to the sensory organs. They have movement, growth besides ever changing power. They are conscious eternally, moving uninterruptedly, growing continuously and changing ceaselessly. These qualities are quite perceivable and common to all the eight forms. This apparent eternal consciousness unmistakably signifies His presence; and is a standing proof of His Omnipotence, and Omnipresence. Aren’t we recognizing the presence of any individual by his physical appearance filling the space with in his mortal frame? What else registers one’s existence, if not his physical occupation of space? Is not Siva establishing His supremacy by His ubiquity? He is present everywhere and lo! at the same time too. And in everything at it. With what else the theists prove His omniscience, Omnipotence, Omnipresence and Omnipresence, if not with this apparent, visible, perceptible evidence starting into the eyes. What wrong is there, if authors expounded this truth through the mouth of a five summer old lad called Prahalad and confirmed the fact of existence of God even in an immovable, inanimate wooden pillar? Aren’t the scriptures dining at the ears of humans ceaselessly that God is present everywhere, and is the wielder of worlds and cause of cosmos first and last?

The immortal, celebrated dramatist Kalidas incorporated this universal, imperishable, ever luminous truth in Abhignana Sakuntalam, saying that the eternal consciousness of the Supreme Reality is manifested in the vibration, motion, expansion, modification of the aforesaid ashtamurtis. This is enough to believe that Almighty God is proving His Omnipresence. More than this Pratyakshanastvam - visible proof, there cannot be found anywhere anything, search with any means, or however long you please.

Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada also reaffirms this immutable truth in this aloha:

\[\text{Bhahahamsah saulo samilo samaharam}\\ \text{Aharnasmhe himarasharam samyabhit checharashramah}\\ \text{Vihamasram yamsat parvatas atitho}\\ \text{Tamasr Srigravansardha prama idam Sri Daksahamsartha}\\
\]

The amsamurtis of Siva exemplified thus becomes an immutable truth. Above all, Jagadguru Bhagavan Sri Krishna ratifies this during His Prabodha to Arjuna —
Further evidence becomes redundant. He superstition, if piled up only confuses the reader or listener. The existence of the Astamurtis of Siva is an indisputable fact and questioning any more reflects one's insanity or muddled cynicism, says a Vedanta Dabblal of this can be attributed to the morbidly of mind, or an apparent sign of atheism. Leaving the doubting Thomasers groping in the pitch darkness of the mass, let us proceed to learn and worship these Astamurtis installed and adored by the humanist ages, no matter whether they are found in the immortal letters, or enameals plateaux fit for such exalted divinities. Mythologies embody several finished and detailed accounts of these places and their origins. The innumerable legends woven round them, and benefits of their adoration, visitation to them are so many, and that ardent theists hasten to them when once they listen or read the glory of these places and the splendour of the indwelling power of the astamurtis along with the parva sadas installed around them.

Though that Supreme Reality is permeating the whole Universe, to be precise, He is occupying the entire cosmos, at only eight holy places. He is revealing Himself, in one particular aspect at one place or the other like Prthvimiurti at Kancheepuram, Agomurti at Jambukeswar etc. For revealing such aspect at that particular spot, there are several causes and the selection of such places is made on grounds most appropriate. The Puranas though differ in certain details, they all converge on the point of sanctity of the place and presence of that aspect.

Let us take up each kshetra, visit and adore that murti soulfully for emancipation. Our first visit is to Kancheepuram, where the Prthvimurti, one of the eight forms is giving darshan since time immemorial. On account of the revelation of this form, it has become a great pilgrim centre and many more such factors contributed to its global importance. Let us visit to examine each of such meritorious factors reverentially for illumination first and implementation of divine ordinances next for emancipation.
KSHITIMURTI THE SEAT OF PRITHVILINGA - KANCHEEPURAM

Uniqueness of Kshitti murthi kshetra

Kanchi enjoys the rare privilege of treasuring up a unique temple culture that none but Kanchi alone could claim equality with it. In matters of spiritual height it scaled, commercial superiority it established and political might it displayed, since Vedic times. Its unprecedented renown springing from more than one segment of national life carved out for itself a meritorious niche in the cultural history of our Akhanda Bharatha Khandas. Its religious tolerance and political stability were applauded by the incarnations of the august divinities. And the inscriptive evidence available speaks volumes of its former glory. So it is a temple city with a speciality of its own.

It is to this self-same place, Parvathi was directed to descend for doing penance to purge of the sin of insulting her own Pati; it is this city deemed by Lord Siva, one of his two eyes, the other being Kasi; it is this holy kshetra that enshrines the Prithvilinga regarded as the Prithvimurthi of the Sivashtamurtis and one of the Panchabhusastha lingas also; it is this Punya Kshetra that was on par with Kasi -- the much hallowed thirtha Kshetra, and also adorns the list of five indispensable pilgrim centres; it is this Punya Kshetra that was chosen by Sankara Bhagavatpada for establishing one of the Kamakoti Peethas for spreading Vedic Dharma.

It is this august place that set limits to the presiding deity -- Kamakshi Ambika by none but a mortal -- Sri Sankaracharya; it is this place that was visited by Bhagawan Buddha and has the honour of listening to his amogha Dharma; it is this city that enjoyed the status of capital city of Tondaimandalam for centuries; it was here during the Sangam period, literatures thrilled the scholars.
with royal banquets; it is here Dharmapala Bodhisattva was born and Buddhist logician Dinnaga lived; it is to this city the imperial monarchs vied with one another to empty their treasures to building temples for both Siva and Vishnu; it is this holy city that was visited by foreign travellers, like Hsuen Tsang, who recorded its eminence and paid rich tributes; it is this city that gave asylum to several religions, like Jainism, Buddhism, Vaishnavism, Saivism that flourished with unenviable amity; it was here the reputed Poet Bharavi, the Sanskrit luminary lived and authored the renowned Kritaranjaniyam, and also the well-known Sanskrit scholar Dandi; it is this city that was ruled by the illustrious monarchs from every celebrated dynasty, like Pallavas, Cholas, Rashtrakutas, Vijayanagara Nayaks, Pandyias, Kakatiyas, Marathas together with Muslim and Britishers; it is to this town's chief temple Robert Clive presented a necklace, when convinced with its divine power; it is this city despite divided geographically into two parts called Vishnu Kanchi and Siva Kanchi, is enjoying religious tolerance of supreme adorable type. Its very name has a ring of imperial majesty and spiritual aroma.

Antiquity

Known reputation of this premier city, as recorded in the scriptures begins with an amorous quarrel between Adidampathis -- Uma and Maheswar. When playing the game of dice as past time, Uma turned frivolous and insulted Maheswar. Despite known for his placability -- the divine trait of forgiveness, he took the insult serious and cursed her to turn ugly and ungraceful. When she made a tearful appeal for mercy, He said that she would be given her rightful place only on doing penance under a single mango tree at Kanchi. Leaving Kailas, Parvathi came down to Kanchi and started tapes to get reinstatement with her Lord. As directed, she prayed first to Lord Vishnu for grace. Satisfied with her resolution, Mahadev blessed her with former enchanting form together with a pair of captivating breed, dark eyes that enhanced her beauty a million fold. She then acquired the hallowed name of Kamakshi, meaning thereby, she blesses her adorers for
fulfilment of their desires by looking through her lovely eyes.

After getting the boons thus, she continued her meditation. Siva desiring to test her steadfastness, released and diverted the flow of Ganga waters to the very place, of her doing penance under the mango tree. Freighted by the unexpected onrush of torrential floods, she clung to Siva's image and prayed soulfully for protection. Pleased with her devotion, Siva admitted her back into Kailas and granted the boon of reunion. At the request of Parvathi, He agreed to stay permanently with the name of Ekambaranath near the mango tree, where she did penance. That sacred tree is found existing even today receiving due worship by theists and tourists too. No visitor misses to include this in the itinerary list.

The Temple Complex

The temple goes by the name of Ekambaranathaswamy koil. Adoration to thisKahitumurti brings forth fortune and fame. It is the biggest and the most impressive temple in Siva Kanchi enshrining the Prithvi lingam representing the Earth aspect. It is a huge temple with five prakaras and elaborately decorated towers. The same mango tree under which she performed tapas is seen even today. Almost all visitors pay obeisance to it due to its sanctity and antiquity. The sculptural wealth of this temple offers of feast to the theists and connoisseurs. Lord Siva is popularly adored as Ekambaranathaswamy here. This Prithvimurthi is fairly a big linga about three feet in height. The special feature observed here -- the Earthen linga is given only Champakastaila abhishek. Abhishek with any liquid, just as milk, water, panner, curd, panchamrita is prohibited. Almost all other ritualistic prayers are offered in accordance with Saivagamas. All the periodical festivals as celebrated in the Sivaalayas are given the utmost importance. Sundaramurti Nayanar worshiped the Lord and his lost eye sight was restored. Tirukkaruppu Thendai and Satyananda devotees were emancipated with this Lord's mercy. The theists offer several types of prayer services during auspicious days with a gusto unprecedented,
and involvement unparalleled. Of the eight Siva Abhutas, Prithvismurti is abiding in this place. Hence this glory (For exhaustive account vide No.4 of the Abode of Gods Series. - AGS).

KAILASANATHAR TIRUKKOVIL.

This is another well known Saivite Tirukkovil that is attracting a steady stream of pilgrims everyday. It was built during the reign of Pallavas. Credit goes to Rajasimha for his monumental contribution to art and religion. The image of Ardhanareswar here casts enchantment irresistible and exercises the greatest attraction. Beautifully drawn murals adorn the alcoves around the perimeter walls. Its sculptural excellences delight the viewers. Offering prayers here, let us move to Kamakshi Amman Koll for the eyesful darshan of the Mother installed in a very big temple.

It lies in the heart of Sivakanchi, the district head quarters town of the same name in the state of Tamil Nadu enjoying all transport facilities.

Our next visit is to Chidambaram to avail the darshan of Akasaasamurti.

2 CHIDAMBARAM - THE SEAT OF AAKASALINGA

Uniqueness of Akasaasamurti Kebatra

Say Chidambaram and look! There appears the image on the mental screen the rhythmic foot work and movements of that cosmic dancer - Nataraja, lost in the demonstration of Bhujanga Tress to the accompaniment of orchestral music to serve a royal banquet to the ears and eyes of the viewers, from His favourite seat of Chitraabhis of Chidambaram temple. Holy is the sight! Holier is the feet!! Holiest is the seat!! And the most holiest is that
expert !!!! This Chidambaram thus emerged occupies the most conspicuous place in legends, as the seat of cosmic dance from time immemorial, in addition, this divya kahatra enshrines the much-venerated Aakaaaliking, one of the five exalted Bhuta lingas, and this Aakaaamurti of Lord is worshipped with utmost reverence over ages. It is to this shrine the four great Saiva Samaya Acharyas — Appar, Sambandar, Sundarar and Manikkavacakkar are intimately connected and produced master pieces eulogising their respective paths -- Charya, Kriya, Yoga and Jnana; it is on this temple towers the entire dance history through 108 modes of dance are carved with descriptions as given in the Bharata Natya Sastra; it is this kahatra, that gave liberation to several hundreds of devotees, like Sage Nanda, Tirunilakandanayanar, Vyagrapada, Patanjali etc., it is to this temple Chola kings made liberal endowments, like adorning the roof with gold plates; it is here according to inscriptions Hiranya Varma Chakravarthi of Kashmir was cured of his leprosy with a single bath in temple Pushkarini as back as in 500 A.D.; it is to this temple Nattukotti Chettiars vied with the royal families to making endowments, such as covering the ceiling with god etc., it is this presiding Lord that was ardently worshipped by imperial monarchs as the family deity; it is here the King dancer -- Nataraja propounded the theory and function of dance forms representing energy, rhythm, harmony and orderliness; for, He treats the world as His stage, and dance representing the Primeval rhythmic energy. And He dances to keeping up the life of cosmos, and it is to this temple, donors deemed it a great privilege to employing master builders, whosecraftsmanship left it a sculptural treasure house and architectural museum. Now let us enter the temple.

The Temple Complex

This temple covering a vast area of 39 acres is in the heart of this city. Its courtyards are quite spacious, accommodating several shrines and mini-shrines built in it. It is surrounded by massive walls with four big tall gopurams in four directions, and a big, tank called
Sivaganga tank measuring 175 x 100 feet in the North with a fine colonnade around, beautified with mum-shrines. Of the two gopurams -- the North and the South ones are of 160 feet high and have the carvings of the 108 dance poses. A unique feature ! A great honour to Natya Sastra !! Their sculptural beauty too is of high quality. It has five principal sabhas -- halls, and are called by different and appropriate names, such as Kanaka sabha, Chit sabha, Nritya sabha, Deva sabha and Raja sabha. The highly venerated image of Nataraja is enshrined in the Chit sabha and it is garbha griha in common parlance. It is here the Lord performed His Cosmic Dance first, and behind the idol and separated from it by a black screen, there is found the Aakaasalnga. To be true, there is no Sivalinga at all, except golden chains adorning the wall, but we are made to believe that there is one invisible linga called Aakaasa linga. This is the real secret of this place i.e., making people believe, that there lies something in nothing. That is mysticism and it is the glory of Hinduism. Sages and seekers of Truth, availed the vision of that august Aakaasamsurti and pronounced that only true devotion realises God, the Almighty.

According to tradition Nataraja emerged from this place. Hence sanctity. The sanctum of Devi Sivakami Sundari lies to the left of Nataraja's icon. The beauty of the Murthas in glittering jewels and gorgeous robes feast the eyes. Behind the image of Nataraja, there is a chakra. The stone steps built to ascend the Chitraasha are five in number and mystically represent the five letters of the Panchakshara mantra - Na ma si va ya. The doors bear the embossed representation of the Sages - Vyagrapada and Patanjali. Adjacent to it lies the Kanaka sabha, where pujas are offered. The ceiling and roofs of these two are covered with gold plates and go by the name of Ponnambalam. The Subrahmanya temple lies next to Ambal temple. It is also a piece of superb art. Adjacent to this lies the Durga temple. All are extremely superb both in architectural and sculptural points of view. (For exhaustive information refer to No.4 of AGS). The third of the Sivasahstramurtis is Tejomurti found in Tiruvannamalai. Now ....
3) TIRUVANAMALAI - THE SEAT OF TEJOLINGA

Uniqueness of Tejomurti Kabetra

Tiruvannamalai Tirukkoil, considered as one of the Panchabhutasasthalas is a reputed Saiva Kabetra of perennial significance of the highest order. Its association with Trimurthies - Brahma, Vishnu and Maheeswar, and subsequent habitation by saint-poets, sage-seers, rajadhirajas, British bhaktas, and countless beneficiaries transformed this seemingly a rugged mount into a Saiva yatrasthala of global importance. Its attraction for religionists and tourists of all nationals, lies in its legends that take back to ancient times, to be precise, the beginning of Kritayuga. Right from the Vedas down to sthalamahatyasams, every genre of literature abounds in evidence of great profusion of Maheeswar's sports played on this sacred place, and His remaining willingly in the form of hill for lifting mankind, burned in the watery grave of Samsara. The holy shrine adorned with gigantic stately towers, lofty prakaras with strong rampart walls, magnificent huge mandapas, beautified by matchless sculptural marvels and architectural grandeur, containing numerous shrines for every adorable deity of Hindu Pantheon, and covering a very vast area of 25 acres, speaks volumes of the glory of temple and Omnipresence of Bhaktavasankar, the presiding deity.

It is here Lord Maheeswar chastited Brahma for lying to him in connection with finding the top of the blazing column. His manifestation; it is here He is remaining in the form of Hill and appearing as Jyoti every year on Karthika Pournami; it is here the celebrated Manikavachagar composed Tiruvembavai; it is here the world famous Bhagawan Ramana Maharashi immortalised the Lord's glory in 108 verses in ecstatic rhapsody; it is here Daivasikamani Desikar demonstrated his yogic powers to bringing back to life the dead horses of a certain Chola King; it is here Ianya Gnana Desikar enabled a European Collector, crossing the flooded river with his spiritual
powers, it is here Guhai Namasivayyar and Guru Namasivayyar wrote Arunagiri Anthathi and Annamalai Venba; it is here in praise of this Lord, Siva Prakasa Swamigal composed Sonasaala Malai, it is here Elleppa Navalar Maharaja had the unique honour of his funeral obsequies performed by Lord Siva Himself, and it is here several mahapurushas attained Suddhi. The miracles of the Lord Siva thus roll into legions and display His unbounded love for bhaktas. Let us listen to its glory before the darsan.

Antiquity

It has numerous legends taking their origin in the Krta Yuga, when gods descended to this Purnabhumis again and again, either for granting boons to devotees, or establishing dharma. Once, Brahma and Vishnu had a row over their relative superiority. — Brahma claimed the first place of honour for His august job of creating worlds, without which nothing can be done, nor any scope for the existence of anyone, so He was the absolute God, but Vishnu contradicting said that Brahma’s creation would come to abrupt end, if His protective hand were to be withdrawn, and when the argument was getting heated, there appeared before them a huge column of blazing fire, without top or bottom. They inferred that it was the manifestation of Lord Siva And rightly too. They then agreed when SIVA said that whoever returned first after seeing the top, or bottom of that blazing column would be adjudged as superior to the other. Brahma then sitting on His vehicle swan went upwards to find out the head, and Vishnu in the form of bear started digging the earth to reach the bottom. Tried however much, Vishnu returning, confessed His limited might.

Brahma too could not, despite flying higher and higher, but accidentally He saw a ketaki — fragrant flower coming down from stop and requested it to give the false evidence of His seeing the top. It agreed. So He claimed His victory, citing the Ketaki flower as witness. Enraged at the insolence of Brahma, Lord Maheswar cursed that Brahma would not have any separate temple for Him.
anywhere in the world, and Ketaki be prohibited for puja. Lord Vishnu was given then the pride of place. The victor and vanquished then prayed to Maheswar to establish Himself here as hill, and to take the form of Jyothishrlings for worshipping by devotees at the foot of hills. Conceding to their request, Lord Maheswar proclaimed His willingness to taking the form of Hill and appearing in the form of Jyothei every year on Kartika Pournami to mark this event. Thus emerged, the celebration of the much venerated Kartika Deepam festival every year with unusual devotional fervour. Large of persons participate in the Beacon Festival on that auspicious day, illumining the whole town, and seen far miles around. And for three days it burns unhindered and undiminished.

The Temple

This holy temple lies at the foot of Arunachala and occupies a vast area of 25 acres of land. It owes its grandeur to four lofty towers - the eastern one called Rajagopuram is the tallest and measures 217 feet; the Western goes by the name Peygopuram; the Southern, Tirumajuna gopuram and the Northern, Amman Amma gopuram. It has five prakaras, and the walls are broad and high, resembling the rampart walls of fort. In each of the prakaras, there are tanks and many minishrines. In the first prakara lies the garbha griha of Sri Arunachaleswar - the presiding deity of this glorious temple. This Tejolings serves the bhaktas with its huge size and bends their heads in veneration. Offering prayers and uttering Harhar Mahadev, they make a retreat, offering prayers to Tayar too, souls filled with the form of the Omnimeriful Siva Sankar. This deity is adored by several awe-inspiring names such as Sonachaleswara, Arunagiriswarar, Vedamurthi, Annamalaiyar, Bhaktavashankar etc. And each name has a story fantastic that brings out the multi-faceted glory of this all-adorable Lord, who blesses the adorers, regardless of their place, time and nature. He is there where genuine devotion manifests, sprouts and rises like fountain. (For further details vide No. 4 of AGS)

For the darshan of Apomurti, one of the famous Sivaashtamurthis, we have to go to Tiruvanasikovil.
TIRUVANAIKAVAL - THE SEAT OF JALALINGA

Uniqueness of Apamurti Kshetra

It is one of the Panchabhutaasthalas called by different names, such as Tiruvanaikkaval, Jambukeswar etc. They have legendary proof and significance and bear the vestiges of ancient glory, illustrating the sports of Uma and Maheswar. This is the holy seat of Apamurti - one of the eight murtis of Lord Siva. The temple is fairly a big one, enshrinining the holy Jalalinga, besides the usual Sivalinga representing Jambukeswar. And both are receiving prayer services regularly on a scale grand and fervour commendable.

It lies just a mile off the world renowned Sri Ranganatha Temple at Srirangam in Tiruchirapalli district of Tamil Nadu, and is attracting thousands of devout Saivates and Vaishnavates round the year. The island town of Srirangam thus enjoys the reputation of being famous as Har Har thirthe kshetra of eternal importance.

The magnificent ancient temple lies surrounded by mango groves and exquisite green island vegetation. In this temple complex, there is situated a grand and well built shrine for Mother Parvathi called here Akhilandeswar. It faces the east, whereas the Jambukeswarar is facing the west. The Chola style of sculptured architectural adornments and spacious courtyards consecrated with several parivaradavatras in majestic niches gifting the eyes afford a feast to aesthetes and parystakas as well. The oddity that strikes the eye here is - during the mid-day pujas, the priest, wearing the dress of a female offers worship, symbolising the fact that Mother Parvathi herself is worshipping the Lord. Another strangeness that greets the visitors is the adorning of the tall bulky stone pillars by the carvings of many puranic figures. One among is the Ekapadeswar figure on one of the broad tall
pillars in the Mahamantapa of Akilandeswari temple. This awe-inspiring image of Eswar is flanked by Brahma and Vishnu with their vehicles Swan and Garuda on either side. It is worth – seeing.

The famous Jalalinga or Apolinga standing for Apomurthi, one of the Sivashtamurthas is installed in a small shrine, lying a little lower than the flooring. It is said that water rises perennially from a subterranean spring lying below the linga and submerges it eternally. So the devotees standing in water have to perform pujas. Admission to this is not on ticket, yet there is steady and heavy rush for availing the darshan of this holy Apomurthi. As the sports of Lord Siva are countless, so are the legends woven round to illustrate His unique vataalya. According to a popular legend, once a spider and an elephant worshipped the Sivalinga simultaneously in an exceptional manner -- the spider weaving a fine web over the linga to prevent the falling of dried leaves on it. And the elephant was bringing the water in his trunk everyday to offer Jalabhishek. The elephant annoying at the hinderance of the Spider’s web was tearing it with uncontrollable fury much to the hatred of spider. The infuriated spider entered the trunk of the elephant one-day and stung it. To get rid of it, the elephant dashed against a boulder incessantly but died in the end. The spider too for being caught up in the trunk. Bhagawan Bhaktavasankar conferred salvation on both. So the place came to be known as Tiruvanasikka, meaning there by the place where the elephant was emancipated.

Regarding the name of Jambukeswar, once there lived a maharshi called Jamba, who did tapas at this spot and pleased the Lord. Satisfied with his ardent penance, Lord Siva has been abiding in the name of Jambukeswar here in accordance with the wish of that Maharshi. The Jambu tree is still seen in full splendour here behind the shrine testifying to the account embedded in the puranas.

Thus this holy thirtha kshetra is doubly important owing to the Lord’s appearance as Apomurthi, and
emancipating the adorers in an exemplary spectacular way.
A visit-worthy pilgrimage centre. (For more, read AGS No. 4)

Our visit to Srikalahasti materialises the darshan of
Vayumurti manifested in a big linga.

SRIKALAHASTI - THE SEAT OF
VAYULINGA

Uniqueness of Vayumurti Kshetra

Sri Kalahasti is a combination of three words -
SRI+KALA+HASTI. Each of its three constituents embodies
an awe-inspiring episode soaked in devotion that published
to the world the peerless compassion of that
Omnicompasionate Lord Maheswar, a byword for kindness.
This thirtha kshetra lies on the Eastern bank of holy
river Swarnamukhi. Though predominantly a Sivashtetra,
it is luring theists of all denominations in leaps round the
year, since the Satya yuga. It is one of the
Panchabhatasthalas enshrining the Vayu linga. The
Vayumurthi, one of the Sivaashtamurtis is installed and
worshipped from time immemorial. On account of the
eternal presence of Gowri and Shankar here, to lifting of
the erring — either the highest, like Brahma, or the lowest,
an insect, this mokshapuri has acquired the homonious title
of Dhanurtha Kailas. Its enchanting history spinning round
the four yugas links up heaven with the earth through a
multiplicity of events, enlightening ultimately that bhakti
should be the consummation of one's existence, and that
alone paves a sure way for Sayaaja prapti. Each of the
episodes that occurred on this Punya dharithri left indelible
imprints on its surface in the form of holy ponds, high
hills, flowing waters, sacred shrines etc., and they narrate
how Lord Maheswar emancipated the persistent sinners by
correction and benediction.

No genuine repentance ever went unrewarded in
this holy place, nor expression of piety desire remained
unfulfilled. For, it is this holy place alone that grants
Sakshataiva Sayuyja of the 105 Sivakshetras scattered all over the Jambudvipe; and it is this Srimaddhakshina Kailas that annihilates the agnana - pasupavirthi in man and lights up the vijnanajyothi; it is in this Sivanandaikesa Nilaya, there lies the much-adored Vayulinga bearing the imprints of Wind-god, spider, elephant and serpent, who worshipped ardently and were liberated as wished for; it is this archamurthi that received adoration by Arjuna among the Pandavas; Appar, Sambandar, Manikavachakar Sundarar among the Nayanars and it is here Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada installed a chakra; it is this presiding deity that blessed the adorers with fulfilment of desires, like power of creation to Brahma; the highest tapassakti to Agasthya, who changed the course Swarnamukhi to flowing near the temple; the Siva Panchakshari to Parvathi that changed her into Gnanaprasunambika; liberation to a victim of paisacha, when the Lord uttered the Pranavamantra in her right ear; permanent cure from the Rajyakshma to the Moon-god Chandra; lusture to the Sun-god - Surya; restoration of kingship to Indra; Salokya prapti to Kannappa, the hunter and lastly Sayuyjaprapti to the spider and elephant after whom the place is named Sri Kalahasti. This Mokshapuri was variously called in each yuga, like Brahmapura in the Krita yuga, Vishnupura in the Tretayuga; Naradapura in the Dwapara and Varaguna Pura in the Kaliyuga. Another mysterious feature about the archamurti that deserves mention is - the linga too has been appearing in different hues in different times, like the golden, in the Krita yuga; silvery in the Treta yuga; metallic in the Dwapara yuga and granite in the Kali yuga.

Siva Panchakshari Mantra and its Efficacy

Mother Jnana Prasunambika, the consort of Sri Kalahasteeswar, worshipped here in a separate shrine is deemed significant and sacred as the Vayu linga of the Lord. The devotees visit it with unbounded devotional fervour; for, she is, as her name indicates stands for gnana of supreme kind and with a mere look she bestows scholarship, wisdom, wealth and spiritual powers. She acquired such powers after centuries of penance and
unaccountable hardships. It has awe-some background, and affords an invaluable lesson to people puffed up with pride of their insignificant traits or virtues. Incidentally it brings out the potency of Sivapanchakshari mantra.

It begins in Kailas and ends on earth here. Among the seven crores of mantras, Sivapanchakshari: NAMASTIVAYA — an integral part of Yajur Veda is supreme and the most potent. And everything becomes venerable by this. It confers all siddhis including the knowledge of sat, knowing of which, there is nothing further to aspire for. Knowing its efficacy, Mother Gouri desired to learn it from her Lord itself. But she forgot that all are not fit to receive, much less aspire, or practise. Only those endowed with Sattvic nature are eligible, and they alone can practise — repeating it fifty lacas of times with utmost concentration. Lord Siva tried to convince of her unfitness, as she was of Rajasic nature out and out, and proud of her blooming beauty and transitory charms. So undeserving. When her adamancy reached the peak, Lord Siva cursed her to turn ugly and wander on earth with every conceivable misery attending on her. Her tearful prayers for redemption melted the All-merciful Lord and He directed her to go the Kalahasti for doing penance, and only then she would be fit to receive that all potent mantra.

Accordingly, Mother Gouri descended, and with the timely guidance of Narada and Vinsayaka reached Kalahasti. Giving up her divine body, she started penance as an earthly mortal. Before commencing, she bade her divine aspect Durga, the most frightful to ward off all the untoward that might likely visit to frustrate her attempt. Taking her seat on the mount nearby, she did what was bid. Lord Siva created a big ocean there at the exact spot of meditation to disturb her penance with its turbulent tempests and dreadful aquatic animals. Mother Gouri remained unmoved, but when the trouble shot up to the unbearable extreme, Durga drank up the entire jalaram with animals in it. Calm returned soon. The tapas thus went on unhindered. Impressed with the unshakable
constancy, Lord Siva gave darsan on the Pournami day of the Pushya masa falling in Pushyami Nakabatra and fulfilled her desire of learning the Siva Panchakshari Mantra from Himself. No sooner did she receive it than she practised it in strict accordance with it tenets. She emerged soon and appeared in her unparalleled physical radiance and incomparable intellectual effulgence on account of Sivagnana permeating her entire physical frame. As the Sivagnana flowered in her to the fullest extent, she was fittingly named Gnana Prasunambika. Lord Siva pleased at the outcome, remained here with her eternally as wished.

The Temple

It lies on the Eastern bank of river Swarnamukhi occupying about five acres. It has three prakaramas pierced by three broad gates lying to the Western, Southern, Northern sides and imposing towers over them. Entering through the Northern called Bikhalagali entrance, the devotees visit Sri Kasi Viswanantha Annapurna shrine first. Crossing this, they enter Bala Jnanananda Prakaram, they worship here Subrahmanya, Patala Ganapathi and Suryanarayana each in a separate shrine. Then they enter through the Hundred Pillared Mandapam built by Sri Krishna Devaraya adorned with beautiful sculpture. Passing through Jalakoti Mantapa and Palgar Mantap they enter the garbha griha lying in third prakara to worship Sri Kalabasteeswara installed on a high pedestal in the centre. It is facing the West, and over the sanctum lies the two-tired Vimana built in the Vesara style. The Presiding deity being the Vayulinga, the devotees observe here the eternal fluttering of oil lamps testifying to the presence of Siva in the form of wind. Hence the offering of all the prayer services to the Utsavamurthi by priests. (An elaborate account is given in AGS No.3).

After visiting the Panchabhutasasthalas, we have to see three more – the Suryamurti; the Chandramurti; and Yajamanamurti to complete the darsan of Sivaashtamurtia.
Khatmandu, the capital of Nepal enshrining the supathinath icon await our visit. Let us up and move.

**6**

**KHATMANDU — THE SEAT OF YAJAMANAMURTI**

Uniqueness of Yajamanamurti Kabetra

The Yajamanamurti of Siva draws our attention and merits elucidation. It is established in the scriptures, that the Pasupathinath image installed in the Khatmandu Siva temple of Nepal stands for the Yajamanamurti of Siva. It is the last aspect of His Ashtamurtis. It represents the collective innate superciliousness born of performing sacrifices and good acts - samischittasatkarma yagnahankarajmanama. Here the archamurti, unlike the Siva lingas seen in all places, reveals in the form of man with four heads facing the four directions. The faces appear alike in expression to the distant view, but not so when examined at close quarters. At least in one, there is a slight variation and it is quite discernable. It represents a terrific aspect and it is facing the South. It strikes terror first and foremost. For a detailed account, let us visit the temple and avail the darsan of Siva, the Lord of destruction. It is from this shrine sacred we learn that the Rudra aspect of Siva finds justification and the Lord squarely deals with man's atrociousness at the opportune time in the fittest manner.

This temple is situated in Khatmandu, the capital of Nepal, a tiny, mighty, lone, independent Hindu kingdom, lying a little beyond Bharatkhanda, but bordering on its northern bounds in the Himalayan region. And is sharing many characteristic features of Aryan culture, although retaining a distinct quality of its own. Let us reach the temple.

The Pasupathinath Temple

It is the principal shrine and deemed the holiest of holies for the entire Nepali nation. It binds all the Nepalis living all over the globe on one silken bond and proclaims
that Saivism is the only state religion, though there are
many Buddha stupas in several places, and people in large
numbers are adoring the Buddha at them. This sacred
shrine is one of the chief rallying points of Hinduism and
has elevated the city to be on par with Varanasi -- the
all-time pilgrimage centre of mankind. Moreover, it is the
focal point of all religious activities; for, both the class
and mass congregate here on every important day during
the year. The royalty holds this in the highest esteem by
visiting regularly and endowing munificently. No true Nepali
ever misses visiting to praying to this august Pasupatinath,
enshrined in a grand imposing mandir. Every Nepali Hindu
-- living in or out of this kingdom, yearns to feast his
eyes with this majestic Chaturmuka Pasupatinath -- four
faced Maheswar and gets blessed by that Omnicompassionate
Lord. And visit periodically, if living elsewhere. Thousands
of Indians visit this sacred shrine during the year, and for
the holy Mahasivaratri festival, devotees from four corners
of the world throng and absorb themselves in several
spiritual activities converting the temple complex into
Bhukailas. And its very memory raises hands in devout
prayers to the Lord Maheswar called her as Pasupatinath.

The Temple

It is built on the bank of Vangmati and is the
haven of religious life of the entire nation. It is a two-
storeyed shrine and resembles a pagoda types of shrine in
its external appearance. The roofs are gilded, and its silver
plated facade attracts and detains the devotees with its
architectural adornments for hours. The dwajastambha and
the entrance are elegantly made and are maintained neatly.
The courtyards are vast and the garbha griha is built on
a higher plane, and surrounded by spacious verandahs with
flights of steps on four sides. Many mini-shrines and niches
are adorned with several deities of the Hindu pantheon.
Next to the temple lies a small pagoda for the Goddess
Bachchla or Vataala, where once human sacrifices were
offered on the Sivaratri day. Another deity that attracts
attention is Narayana which is housed in the first prakara.
It is believed that the whole statue was sculptured in a
single night, so, it is a piece of beauty worthy of seeing.
In the second prakara there are hundreds of lingas in rows in a enclosure with adequate space for movement and worship by the devotees.

Archamurthi

Lord Maheswar in the name of Pasupathinath is worshipped here in the form of linga. It is about three and a half feet in height and is installed on a high pedestal. The august linga has four faces sculptured on four sides. Each is a sculptural marvel, and its facial features and beautifully executed. All the four faces seem exuding compassion to the devotees, but to the wicked and vicious, they strike terror and send them to Mrithyuloka. Of the four, the one facing the south has a characteristic terrific aspect. The wicked are mortally afraid to look at it even for a split second. It is roudra that emanates from it for them when look at it. The pitiless mood it represents caused death in some cases. There is a story current that Mukundsen, a remorseless invader, who raided and plundered Kathmandu with a sword in one hand and fire in the another looked at this face, when came to destroy it. A straight look at it shook him to his foundations, as chill passed through his spine instantaneously. Unable to stand its fierceness, he mounted his horse and dashed off homewards. Alas, his corpse alone reached home. Such is the terror the face strikes to the wicked, but, for the virtuous, it emits rays of compassion and sends thrills of bliss. The priests offer several kinds of prayer services to the presiding deity as done to its counter parts in India. Hours spent in the campus seem like a fleeting moment and it leaves an indelible impression on the minds. The visitors lock it up in their minds to be cherished for ever. A visit lifts ! A sight emancipates !! And the memory recreates the whole sublimity in a flash and plunges one in ecstatic raptures of blissful joy, if recalled. (For some more details vide No. 2 of AGS)

THE SURYAMURTI - ONE OF THE SIVASHTAMURTIS

Then comes the Aditya - Surya representing Sun-God as one of the forms Sivashtamurtis. This stands for
the buddhi-gnana aspect, not of any particular individual or living creature, but the whole mass of animate world i.e. the collective representation of the gnana of the living world. Hence fixing of a place or shape to it becomes incongruous and absurd. If done, only incompatibility emerges keeping the conception in disharmony. If visual representation is insisted upon, we have to point to the Sun, the fixed planet around which all other planets are going round in their orbits without any stop, since creation and assigning of the offices to them done by that All Highest Siva Himself. Yet the Vijnanabhaskaras -- the sages for easy comprehension and constant adoration explained that visible and perceivable Sun is Siva. The following sloka giving the evidence authenticates the truth:

\[ \textit{Adityanaha Sivam vidyat Sivam Aditya rupinim} \\
\textit{Vubhayoh antharam nastihi Adhityasya Sivasyacha} \]

So the Suryamurti standing fixed to his place eternally, and blessing the charachara prapancha with His effulgence is nothing but the collective aspect of Jnana of Siva. Worshipping his icons in the temples or adoring him directly tantamounts to offering puja to one of Siva's Ashtamurtis. The fact that the Sun is the source of light and energy should not be forgotten, or side tracked in our zeal for worshipping the Supreme deity. Would the world survive, if the energy and light are denied, or delayed even for a second? If seen in the proper perspective, this fact alone establishes the existence of God, the Almighty and His abundant compassion for the creation. For the darsan of Chandramurti, read ...

**CHANDRAMURTI - ONE OF THE SIVASHTAMURTIS**

Similarly the Moon-God standing for the Chandramurti, one of the AshtamurTis of Siva is to be adored, and offering worship to him should be deemed worshipping Lord Siva only. Comparative diminutive size and power should in no way hamper our fervour for
veneration. If the Sun scorches us with the intensity of heat, or blindens with immensity of effulgence, the Moon with the extremity of coolness freezes us for our own good. It only refreshes, rejevates us for further work and progress. Imagine for a while the Sun's dominion round the clock. "Oh horrible!" saying so we at once close our eyes as a mark of our intolerance. The Sun and the Moon are like the object and shadow exist together, one does not exist without the other, nor bear seperation. Persistence for singleness sniffs out subsaistance of either. The Chandramurti aspect standing for one of the Sivashtamurtis is given form, size and attributes for adoration. In several places temples are built for regular worship with rituals, but rarely this fact is given due emphasis. Yet the Moon-God is receiving worship. Some point out that the Somanath temple in the Prabhasakshetra of Sourastra enshrining the beautiful linga is the Chandramurti aspect of that Ashtamurti of Siva. (For exhaustive information vide No.1 of AGS). Contradicting it, a few affirm that the Chandranathaswami icon installed and worshipped in the temple of Chatgaon in Bengal is representing that aspect of Siva. In fact, when that auspicious aspect is quite visible for twelve hours and lighting up the dark worlds, regularly and eternally, why straying into the dominion of disputes and hear the hair-splitting arguments that only lead into darkest caverns to searching for a black cat laboriously in its absence at it, aver, the wise. It is enough if worship is made to that cool-beamed, soft-lighted Moon, and it invariably goes to that Ashtamurti Siva.
Over and above these holy Ashtamurtikshetras, there are twelve Saivakshetras equally famous and immensely popular, and they are called Dwadasa Jyotirlinga kshetras. By virtue of several unique features connected either with their origin, or installation by men of superior eminence, gained by devotion or super human powers, they have been luring devout bhaktas since their emergence, dating back to the Vedic times. All of them are Swayambhu lingas – self manifested ones only. But materialised and offered to the devout people by Bhagavan Maheswar Himself at their earnest appeal, consequent on being freed by the formidable demonic forces subjecting them to untold hardships. And remain unaffected by the pralayas. Sivapurana embodies exhaustive accounts, envisaging the cause for their emergence, salient features and miracles produced by the august divinities on occasion more than once at these places. There is a belief current that one rides himself of the evil influences of Satanic forces by visiting and worshipping at these holy places. Though some of them are located in inaccessible places throughout the year, and their doors are kept open only for a few months in the year, the influx of the theists and their anxiety to avail the darsan eludes description. Braving the vagaries of weather, travelling in all sorts of vehicles, and trekking scores of miles in the icy regions to reach the sannidhis by both old and young reflect the glory of the kshetras and man’s yearing for BhagavadGuru. The ordeals of Kedarnath Kshetra yatra can be singled out as an outstanding example for the point in question.

They are listed down with details of their location in scriptures thus:

- Sourastro Somanathanchise, Srisaila Mallikarjunam
- Ujjainyam Mahakalam, Omkaram Analeswaram
- Himalayantha Kodaram, Dakiniyam Bhimashankaram
- Varanasiyantu Vivesam, Trimbaham Goutamitare
- Sethubandhtatu Rameem, Nagesam Darukavane
- Parayam Vaidyanathanchise Ghushmeswanche Sivalaye
- Etani Jyotirlingani sayam pratah smaret Narah
- Saptajanma Kritampapam Smaranena Vinayati
There is a wide spread belief current in the ardent theist community, that janma - life becomes charitartha - live worthy only by visiting all the twelve, or atleast a few of the kshetras. Even with a single visit to anyone of them, one gains emancipation. And according to the scriptures these holy temples remain unaffected by the great deluge mahapralaya. Age withers not, taste changes not, Satan subverts not, weather curbs not, atheism erases not, skepticism shakes not their immaculate, immanent, infinite, inexhaustible, irrepressible, imperishable effulgent glory. Should anyone then dare say, that Omnipotent, ever-auspicious, all pervading, all knowing, Highest Premordial - Jagatkaraka is not abiding in each of them ? Is not every one of the twelve, the earthly representation of His unsurpassable power ? See Him in each of them His cosmic rupa, adore Him making heart a flower, and get emancipated. Wisdom hastens to their sannidhi, and devotion prostrates at their feet That is what all is expected by that All-Benevolent God.

Their Mahatmya is so efficacious, and legends are fascinating that one is freed from the sins accruing from the past seven births by their mere remembrance both at dawn and dusk, says the Preest more th.n visiting to worship them at their places. Yet pilgrimage confers manifold blessings and anoints the bodies with the nectarine look of the Lord that makes existence graceful, easeful, peaceful and adorable. So visit as many as possible.

Now let me recount each of the twelve with details necessary for full grasp of their splendour. Keeping in view of the conveyance, statewise visitation is preferable. Hence followed starting from Kedaram to Ramesam. As most of these centres of pilgrimage are dealt with elaborately in “The Abodes of Gods Series” seven in number containing the premier temples of India, devout readers may read them for more details. The kaleidoscopic picture given hereunder, however, embodies all the salient features. First let us go up to Kedareswar for eyeful darsan and soulful prayers.

KEDARNATH - KEDAR SAMBHU JYOTIRLINGA

Uniqueness

Kedarnath temple, enshrining one of the twelve Jyotirlingas of our Punya Bharat Varaha is situated on the Himalayan slope in the Gharwal district of Uttar Pradesh. It has several unique features that have not been enjoyed
by any other Saivakshetra, existing since the Dwapara Yuga. Sacred Vedas and Epics, Ithihasas and Samhithas embody numerous references and bring out its glory in glowing terms, filling in hundreds of pages of every genre of our literature. They highlight justifiably its sanctity and prove its uniqueness from the stand point of its location in both snow clad peaks; habitation of Lord Maheswar Himself for six months a year, and visitation by celestials periodically.

The famous shrine located at an elevation of 11,735 feet above sea-level, the highest point among the hill temples is visited by ardent pilgrim in millions every year. It is nestled in the Rudra Himalaya, an integral part of the Himalayas and this region is called by many different names, such as Gandhamadana parvatha, Sumera parvatha, Pancha parvatha etc. The last is named so due to the fact of its having five sacred peaks, namely Rudra Himalaya, Vishnupuri, Brahmapuri, Udayagiri Kanna and Swargarohini. The celebrated Swargarohini trodden by the Pandava brothers and Droupadi to reach heaven is one among the five peaks mentioned in the Mahabaratha in detail. Around the Kshetra lie several spots exuding divine aroma, all but telling about Lord Maheswar's sports and illustrious anecdotes in particular relating to the life of His divine consort Uma, One for Vinayaka called Munda katta Ganesh Mandir—the place where Maheswar blessed Vinayaka with elephant head.

It is the self-same region, where Arjuna did severe penance to please Maheswar for the boon of Pasupata, the most potent among all the astras; the very same place pervaded by the apurva sourabha of the flower Kalayana Saugandhika, for procuring of which Bhima fought against Kubera, the very same place containing the samadhi of Jagadguru Sri Sankaracharya; the self same sacred point, where the Pandavas built the temple, and was consecrated in this yuga by Adi Sankara, and it is this mountainous terrain that gives birth to several holy rivers like Mandakini etc. It is here in this precincts Lord Maheswar abides and is worshipped by the lesser ranks of gods for six months and the rest of the year by the humans, according to the wish of the sages. With many more of
such celebrated spots, this hoary region has become an eternal inspiration for devout people right from the Dwapara yuga to the present time.

Antiquity

Nara Narayan Episode

Regarding its origin, Kotirudra Sam Hita gives an interesting account. It narrates that once, the two sages Nara and Naryan -- the incarnations of Sri Mahavishnu did penance in Badarikasram, and they were worshipping an earthen Siva linga made by themselves with utmost devotion. Their inimitable piety and single-minded tenacity pleased the Lord most, and so He appeared before and asked them to name any boon that He would grant forthwith. The highly evolved humanist sages asked for the boon that the Lord must stay there eternally in the form of Jyotirlinga for blessing liberation to the pious, who worship Him at that place. Pleased with their desire for patitamanavoddharana, He said 'Thadastu' and accordingly He is dwelling in the shrine in the form desired.

Siva Purana testifies to the account thus: "At Kedara, Lord Siva Himself has been worshipped from time immemorial by gods and the nationals of Bharata Khanda. Kedara Sambhu, the Lord of the cosmos is undoubtedly the exalted presiding deity of this sacred Bharata Varsha and the yielder of all desires". It is also mentioned that giving dana of a kankana-arm ring here has special merit. Offering of pindas to the ancestors after a dip in the river Mandakini brings forth enviable merit and liberates the entire kula. Sraddhas at any place in this region are efficacious and yield greater benefits. It is said that anyone who drinks the water from Retaskund here is freed from rebirth; and here Siva stays permanently and the place goes by the name Isana Sikara. It is the spiritual EL Dorado of the Saivates from the dawn of religion.

The Rudra Himalaya region is dotted with scores of spots associated with the sports of Lord Siva. Amongst them Gourikund deserved some space here. It has some
hot water springs, and it is from this place trekking, or riding to the shrines starts. Pilgrims invariably commence their yatra after a dip in this Kund. Apart from the sanctity, the thrill of taking a bath in the steaming hot waters nearing boiling point drives away all the chill -- sins striking on to physical bodies and they feel lifting of their souls to be huddled at the holy feet of the Lord Maheswar, the Omnicompassionate among the Trio. It is quite refreshing and this memorable experience gets locked up in their minds to be cherished for ever. Tradition records that Parvathi too bathed here after delivering Karthikeya, the commander-in-chief of Deva Sena. Another place of interest is Trijuginarayana. Puranas credit it with the association of the Lord’s marriage with Parvathi, and the fire enkindled during the wedding is still burning at this spot. How miraculous ? Pilgrims offer prayers with elaborate rituals.

Epic Evidence

The epic Mahabharata is packed with many an awe-inspiring event, enacted on this Punya Kshetra, displaying exemplary prowess and spiritual glory of the Pandavas. Bharavi’s Krishnarjuniyam embodies the thrilling and existing episodes of Arjuna’s peerless skill in the archery that won from Lord Maheswar, the much--coveted Pasupatastra. The Lord, it appears, was more pleased with, Arjuna’s unparalleled duantlessness and sublime large-hearted manliness than the penance. Yudhista, was initiated by Veda Vyasa on this Punya bhoomi. To cap all, as it were, when advised by the elderly wisemen, the Pandavas came to this Kshetra to atone the sins of Kurukshetra war, but Lord Maheswar seeing them approaching at the time set apart for the gods only, assumed the form of bull and started running away. When the Pandavas tried to catch Him, He entered the Earth, so only the rump – the hind parts of His body remains visible at this place and He is worshipped as Kedareswar. The other parts of the Lord’s body like limbs, face, naval and jata are visible at other places, such as arms at Tunganath, face at Rudranath, belly at Kapaleswar and front part at Nepal. The legend
ends that Siva when entered thus became five fold; and all are held sacred. All these places are located in the Himalayas and they go by the name of Pancha Kedaras. The Pandavas then built a shrine and worshipped Him with unequalled fervour. It is said that the very same temple is existing without alternations and the self-same Siva linga is worshipped by the devotees now.

The Temple Complex

The temple thus came into existence is modest in dimensions; yet majestic in appearance with gilded steeple, piercing into azure sky and shining bright against the back drop of snow-capped mountains. It is built of dressed stone and is treasuring up sculptural wealth of rare kind. Though the exterior is bereft of either architectural excellences, or sculptural embellishments, the inside is adorned with marvellous images of supreme craftsmanship that wring veneration from the devotees. It has two parts -- the mandap and the garbha griha. In the garbha griha, there is seen an irregular shaped conical rock measuring about five feet by four feet and worshipped as Lord Maheswar .. Kedareswar. The local name for this is Siva Pinda. According to tradition, it is the rump of the bull, the form which the Lord assumed at the time of Pandavas nearing Him. There are many beautiful idols on the walls representing the sports of the Lord. Nandi -- the divine vehicle of the Lord arrests the attention of the on-lookers by its unusual size and sculptural beauty.

The second is located on the banks of Pavana Ganga that purges of all our sins let us visit Varanasi for the blessings of Kasi Viswanatha Bhagawan.

8 KASI VISWANATHA JYOTIRLINGA

Uniqueness

Kasi is the first place that flashes across your mind, whenever you think of a pilgrimage; the first indispensable
visit-worthy thirtha kshetra dedicated to Lord Maheswar abiding in the Jyotirlinga; the first in the list of All-India yatra-cum-tourist centres proudly advertised by the Tourist Organisers, marked with a big dot in their map; the first place of first preference for both vanaprasthasram -- the last stage in life, and kshetrasanyasa -- binding the pious Hindu’s last wish to breathe his last there and immersion of ashes in Ganga; the first seat of ancient Viswavidyalaya, specialised in Sanskrit studies and traditional lore; the first holy city having the much-revered bathing ghats numbering 64; the first holy city boasting of modern Hindu University, imparting education in 42 different branches of knowledge, and Hindu culture in all its aspects; the first of the most ancient living cities, displaying the vestiges of Vedic culture; the first that witnessed the performing of ten horse sacrifices one after another; and the first of many such firsts; for, it is the first dearmost seat of Lord Maheswar, who Himself on selecting for permanent settlement pronounced, “The three worlds form one city of mine, and Kasi is my Royal Palace therein”. So the galore firsts can be stretched as far as patience permits, since it is the endless and extant pilgrim centre since time immemorial.

From the aeons of time, particularly from the dawn of aptitude for religion, highest veneration is extended to this holy place by all classes of people; especially by those, who realised the potency of devotion and fear of sin -- daiva bhakti and papa bheethi. As it was deemed the holiest place due to permanent presence of Maheswar -- the Bhaktava Shankar, and the flowing of all-purifying Ganga, hundreds of emperors performed yagas, and built many shrines and dharmasalas for the comfort of ever-increasing influx of yatria. One can come across small shrines adorned with Siva lingas at the head of each bathing ghat, in addition to well-built, and neatly maintained temples at many places. The lanes and by-lanes are dotted with pedestals for Sivalingas, making Hinduism peep from every inch of this holy city. Being the centre of Sanskrit learning, literary activities of high order, and religious
performances of all types are being carried on to make this place busy round the clock, and through all the seasons, that TIME seems to stand still here. Modernity has never wiped out traditionalism, nor mutability gulped down the boary culture, founded and nurtured by the famous Maharishis. So an infinite number of generations have visited, are visiting and will visit, deeming Kasi Visweswar's darsan is the highest goal of life -- the be-all and end-all of religious living.

It is here the untouchability was totally eradicated in the dim past itself. Narayanhhatt's reference establishes this fact beyond doubt. He says -- "In the Kali age all demerit that may arise from touching the untouchable objects is removed by Lord Siva Himself, who in His boundless mercy takes daily bath in Manikarnika in the early hours of the day for the benefit of humanity. Buddha gave his first sermon and set in motion the wheel of law here in Sipatan now goes by the name of Saranath.

This universally famous; eternally young; perpetually divinising; religiously emancipating; spiritually ever-growing; and morally undiminishing city has many more august names that published its glorious past and beckons a visit sooner than hearing it. It was called Varanasi; for, it is an island surrounded by the holy waters of Varuna and Asi -- the tributaries of Mother Ganga; Kasi, for it is the place of supreme brilliance -- tremendous shining, lighting up the way to Nirvan; Avimuktaka -- for it is free from sin on account of Lord's eternal presence; Ananda Kanana; for it affords the highest delight to Lord of Mahasmasana; for, it is here lie the five elements in great cemetery, as dead bodies reach after destruction. And lastly Banaras, a corrupt form of Varanasi in use till 1956 and was changed to Varanasi by Government. Skanda purana grows eloquent and pours down in torrents evidence to testify to the glory of this holiest of holies in as many as 15000 verses. A great honour! A covetable place!! None can claim any comparison !!!
Antiquity

The story of Lord Maheswar's selection of this place for permanent settlement is quite fascinating and sheds light on His love for Parvathi, His inseparable spouse. After marriage, it appears, once Menaka -- Parvathi's mother bewailed, "My son-in-law is without proper dwelling place, without wealth and without attractive personality too. It is indeed a folly that Parvathi committed in her selection. They are ill-matched in very aspect". Parvathi narrating it, told Him of her resolve to settle down at her parents' house. To please her, Maheswar commissioned Nikumbha to manoeuvre Divodas, the king of Kasi out of that grand city. Nikumbha appeared to Aunikumbha, a brahmin of great austere life in dream and asked him to build a temple for Maheswar. He passed on this to Divodas, who accomplished the pious wish of the Brahmin. Lord Maheswar soon after installation started granting several kinds of boons to the worshippers, and so the temple became very popular in a short period. Though everyone's desires were fulfilled, the gift of son for Divodas remained withheld. Unable to making compromise with his misfortune, the king demolished the temple beyond recognition. Hearing this Nikumbha flew into ungovernable rage and cursed that the city would be depeopled -- Janasunya soon. The curse ran its course. Then Nikumbha invited Lord Maheswar to settle down here permanently. He descended with Parvathi and soon it developed in all directions -- dasadisa. And the Omnmerciful Maheswar began bestowing on all blessings, and demonstrating His powers through several miracles. Infinitely contented Parvathi, assuming the name of Annapurna started offering people anna -- daily food, the basic necessity of man's existence. And lo! she made her position supremely august and incomparably mighty that her Lord Himself was constrained to come to her for food with a bowl in His hand. This is exquisitely represented in the temple dedicated to her, lying adjacent to her Lord's shrine. According to one version, she represents Goddess Sakti, and Varanasi is one of the ancient Saktipathas. Sakti's left hand fell here, when Mahavishnu's Sudarsan -- disc cut the corpse of Sati
into several pieces, when carried by Siva. And it is worshipped since then, and so it is one of the 52 Saktipithas.

The Glory of Kasi

Skanda purana embodies the origin of this holy place and narrates several glories connected with the sports of Lord Maheswar played in this thirtha kshetra. It is Maheswar's capital, and He abides in it eternally. Bhaktavasankar - the Omnibenevolent God is the supreme brilliance and shines in all His resplendent splendour to light up the way for his children's Nirvana-kas to shine; he releases the worshippers from the shackles of Punarjanma. To live, or die in Kasi is considered meritorious and several millions of devout Hindus prefer living here in the last stage of their life. Some go to the extent of taking the vow of kshetrasanyasa - living in the presence of deity, and under no circumstances going beyond five knosas of Lord Mahadeva; for, dying in Kasi ensures liberation – from the wheel of transmigration.

The Mandir

The present temple is surrounded by busy commercial establishments. As we proceed passing through the shopping complex, we see Annapurna temple on the right side. It is small, but studded to the portals with very many adorable deities. The images of Goddess in sitting posture with Maheswar standing with a bowl are extremely grand and invoke instant veneration. There are many niches and mandapas adorned with many dieties. Offering prayers, we reach the garbhagriha of Maheswar. The sacred Phallus – Sivalinga is installed in a square shaped brass plated pit – hollow. Every one is allowed to offer prayers himself, though there are Pandas, who conduct the entire ritual with chants, if required. Many prefer personal prayers – pouring of the Gangajala on the Sivalinga, waving of burning camphor, after garlanding it. It is a rare privilege granted, and the performer experiences an inexplicable thrill passing his spine, when uttered ‘Harahar Mahadev’ after rituals. There are many more small shrines
and several niches around this holy shrine. A little beyond this, there lies the famous Jnana Vapi -- well of knowledge, where the deity entered, when iconoclasts destroyed the temple. Behind the temple to the East, near Jnana Vapi, there is the Mosque, built by Aurangzeb. In the by-lane behind the temple, there is a temple of Dhundhiraja Ganapathi. Belief is current that he is the State Officer of Varanasi with Bhairava as Kotwal, the Chief Police Officer, Lord Maheswar, the Emperor and Annapurna, the Empress feeding the people. Feeling emancipated at the darsan of Lord Maheswar and Goddess Annapurna, yatris then go about visiting several places scattered to the four corners of this sprawling city.

Next trip is to Dwaraka, the earthly capital of Lord Krishna, in the vicinity of which lies Darukavan, where that Karunaikasindhu Kailasanath is abiding in the holy linga after fulfilling the deserves of His devotees.

DWARAKA -- NAGESWARA JYOTIRLINGA

Background

In the aeons gone by, in the primeval forest of Daruka near Dwaraka in Sourastra, an integral part of present Gujarat state, there lived two celebrated Siva devotees of rare type. They belonged two opposite races -- one was manava and the other danava and they were called Supriya and Daruka. Due to taking birth in rakshasa race, and perhaps by breeding, the latter was cruel, wicked and inhuman to the point of taking blood of manavas for nothing, a glaring example of racial aversion; but he was a Siva bhakta of supreme type. So far Supriya is considered, he was a Vaisya by caste--merchant carrying on business on a big scale, using ships for export and import of merchandise. Although trade does not admit fair play - i.e. lying is as regular as breathing, and honesty is a commodity deemed a rarity; he was a Siva bhakta of superior breed. He prided devotion above wealth and clung to the lotus feet of the Lord SIVA at all times.
It happened -- once, when he was sailing to far-off countries, his ship was caught in a terrific gale and brought to a portless shore near Darukavan, where Daruka with his wife Daruki were regaling in asurakrityas -- teasing, torturing their born enemies -- manavas for sadistic pleasure. When he was brought to his court for punishment, he learnt that Supriya was a great Sivabhakta. So he requested him, surprisingly to teach him the mystery of Sivapanchakshari and the procedure of doing Sivapuja. Presuming that Daruka would abuse the Sivamahima, if gained by learning it from him, he refused to reveal the secret. In consequence, he was imprisoned and crushed to the last drop by atrocious punishments. Ironically, the candle of his Sivabhakti burnt more effulgent than before, as he was engrossed in meditating on Siva, his Ishta Devata throughout the ordeals. Satisfied with this unique steadfastness and unbounded devotion, Lord Siva, the Omnicompassionate appeared and killed the demon on the spot.

Supriya, of course, was saved but not the people; for Daruki, the wife of Daruka having obtained innumerable boons from Mother Uma, continued asurakrityas more barbarously than before and turned herself a veritable form of Death in her Rakshasa physical frame. Sympathising the people, Siva manifested Himself as Jyotirlinga and lifted Saranagathas en masse. At their instance, and by the intense power of devotion of Supriya, Lord Siva has been abiding in this place to protect devotees as desired. Later a suitable temple was built and regular worship was conducted that alone is acting as rakshakavach for the people. The Jyotirlinga that emerged is still receiving all types of prayer services in a well-built temple near Dwaraka, the earthly abode a Lord Krishna. It is on the way to Beti Dwaraka. This linga is called by another name of Nageswar or Naganathaswamy.

But there is a contradiction regarding the place, since the Nageswar Jyotirlinga is claimed to exist in two places. One of course, is near Dwaraka as cited above, and the other is near Audhgram. It can be reached from Purna junction. And even this also is rejected by another
claim, which located it near Almora in Uttarpradesh. Well, whether the Nageswara Jyotirlinga is found near Dwaraka or Audhgram or Almora, the All-merciful Siva blesses munificently, if prayed soulfully. Pray and be blessed.

Now comes Ujjain where the Lord is revealing Himself as Mahakala, the Layakara, snapping the earthly bonds of mankind to giving them eternal bliss.

**UJJAIN – MAHAKALA JYOTIRLINGA**

**Introduction**

Lord Maheswar, the Karunaikasindhu in His fiercest aspect of destroyer is adored as Mahakala - the samhara karthaka at Avantika. It is a standing testimony of the universal truth that compassion embodies in itself annihilation too. Avantika became one of the premier metropolitan cities of ancient India and trailed a blaze of light across the pages of history due to Lord Maheswar's taking His seat here in this role, and He is still continuing so, as evidenced by certain relics in the form of sculptural monuments, besides adorning the pages of literature with purple patches of descriptions of infinite variety by immortal poets such as Kalidasa, Bana etc., whose creative artistry invested the place with grandeur that surpassed Amaravathi, the first word in the inimitable grandiose splendour. This city went by the magniloquent name of Ujjayini -- the victorious city in mythology, Ujeni in history, Avanti in literary master-pieces and Ozene in the travelogues of foreigners. The history of its past is vast and magnificent.

Situated on the banks of Sipra, it is a thirtha kshetra, advocated for thirtha yatra. Of the many plus points, historically and mythologically, its importance as the seat of Lord Mahakala tops the list and won crowing glory to the place, followed by many others, such as, it is the
sixth of the twelve Jyotirlingas; and also the sixth of the eighteen Sakthipthas; the dominating capital of valorous monarchs, like Vikramaditya, the founder of Vikramarka Saka, King Pradyota of Swapnavasavadatta fame, Jayasimha, the builder of observatory, Munja and Bhoja of great renown; and the birth place of historical personages, such as Devi, the wife of Asoka samrat and the mother of Mahendra and Sanghamitra, Vasavadattha, the beauty queen of those days; the sacred place where the Kumbha Mela has been taking place once in every 12 years; the seat of famous Gurukula, where Krishna, Balarama and Sudhama had their education under Sandipini; it was the place where the great nine gems of Vikramaditya flourished, who immortalised its fame through several media, and finally it is the Greenwich of the first meridian of zero degree.

The Dushana Episode

The advent of Mahakaleswar here has interesting background. Though this place had acquired eminence as a holy tirtha kshetra, the worship of Lord Maheswar—as Mahakala started with the atrocities perpetrated by Dushana, a dreadful demon living in the Ratnamala Hills near Avanti, the old name with which the present Ujjain was called then. The asura was of wicked type, who not only killed the inhabitants for sadistic pleasure, but relished the flesh of the corpses — a cannibal first and last. He was appearing unexpectedly to emptying the dwellings, and disappearing after leaving bones everywhere. People were mortally afraid of his name, why, many used to breathe their last, at the mention of his name even — they neither enjoyed peace, nor lived with dignity.

When they were passing through restless nights and graceless days, some among them suggested to approach a pious brahmin living in Avanti itself for help; for, he was noted for his spiritual life together with practising yoga. A quite going man as he was, he neither craved for publicity, nor longed for worldly fame. He was a hermit, although
living amidst mahanagara. Meeting him, they appraised him of the asura's wicked acts and the fact of premature deaths mounting higher day after day. Moved by the accounts, he decided to put his yoga Vidya to public benefit. Dispersing the people, he offered pujas in a pattern of his own to Lord Maheswar and prayed for His instant intervention. His yogic powers were of superior kind that Lord Maheswar coming out of a chasm of the earth near the yagna kund caught hold of the demon at once and destroyed him. The whole nagara breathed peace and then they solicited the Lord along with the brahmin to abide in the city for their regular worship, which was granted. And since then Maheswar in the role of destroyer under the new name of Mahakala is abiding in the form of Jyotirlinga, blessing the people and relieving them from all kinds of distresses.

Though Lord Maheswar is adored in several hundreds of places throughout the length and breadth of Bharatha Khand, it is here in Ujjain, He is called Mahakala for appearing in his role of destroyer. Agni Purana and Skanda eulogising the sacredness of this thirtha kshetra conclude that a mere darsan of Mahakala liberates the pious person and saves him from akalamrityu -- untimely death. The God bestows on the devout bhaktas Salokya prapti -- living in the same loka; Sarupyamukti assuming the form of the Lord, Sameepya sakti - living in the proximity of the Lord and finally Sujuamukti - merging in the Lord, according to the desire of the adorers. Being the bestower of all kinds of muktis, particularly freeing the adorers from untimely and accidental death - akala mrityu, He has been ascending in supremacy with the passage of time sans break, since installation.

The Temple Complex

The famous temple of Mahakala lies in the heart of Ujjain -- situated beside a lake of unusual dimensions. And it is infront of Devi temple. This is a three-storyed temple with a massive compound wall and a tower
beautified with sculptural adornment of many kinds. The archamurti is about 3 feet in height and its pedestal is made of brass and silver with artistic embellishments. The decoration of Mahakala with flowers and sandal paste feasts the eyes. The frontal view with sandal paste make up, beautified with two broad eyes between the long nose over the charming mouth, adorned by the twisted moustaches is quite enchanting, and the brass lamps lighting up the spacious garbha griha heighten the majesty of the Lord and leave an indelible impression on the minds of viewers. Its architectural design of antique type, huge dimensions of the courtyards with spacious verandahs and grand pavilions for several adorable deities detain the visitors for hours and lift their souls. There are certain strange traditions here – one amongst such peculiar traditions is, whatever is offered to the Lord Mahakala can be offered again and again after duly washing. This kind of offering of the same item for the second time is honoured and accepted. No where such practice is observed in India; for, once if anything is offered to God, it is final and only the giver, receives it back as mahaprasad, and so deemed unfit for further offering to any god. Lesser in rank even. Is not Mahakala combining karuna and samhara in Himself, the most strangest among the strangest. Some reoffer the bilva leaves after duly washing them again. Sivapurana deals this topic at length and justifies it with proof. The visitors usually taking bath on the Ratnaghat of the river Sipra flowing nearby, worship the Lord with great devotional fervour accompanied by ‘Harahara Mahadev’ slogans which reverberating the entire region rend the skies to reaching the Kailas to awaken Him, as it were, to grant them boons.

Now comes Omkareswar lying very near to this but on the bank of Narmada enshrining the Omkareswar Jyotir Linga, that emancipated illustrious personages.
OMKARESWAR - OMKARESWAR
JYOTIRLINGA

Uniqueness

It is an island temple, built on the bank of river Narmada, which branches out here into two and forms an island in the centre. The world famous Omkareswar temple lies atop the Mandhata hill and is doused by Narmada perpetually. This is called Mandhata, but its ancient name was Sivapuri; it can be surmised that due to the existence of two holy temples dedicated to Siva, going by the names of Omkareswar and Amareswar this was called Sivapuri then. The Omkareswar temple enshrines in it one of the Jyotirlingas and has an awe-some antiquity dating back to Krita yuga. Legends are many, all but sing in praise of the glory of this thirtha kshetra. For, it is here, Mandhata belonging to Ikshvaku race performed great penance; it is here the holy river Narmada offers jalabhishek to the Lord of Mount Kailas; it is here Govind Bhagavatpada lived in a cavern and initiated a Kerala brahmin lad called Sakara, who acquired the much honorific name of Adi Sankara and founded the Advaita school of philosophy; it is here the Sivalinga splitting up into two is going by the names of Omkareswar and Amareswar or Amaleswar at the earnest request of gods and maharshis; it is here the Vindhya Hills, propitiating, Lord Siva obtained the boon of growing to outbeat the Mount Meru in height; it is here stands a hill called Brigupattana on which the highly orthodox devotees committed religious suicide to get instant moksha; it is to these temples, the Peshwas spent huge sums of money for renovation, and finally it is here the river Cauvery joins Narmada. This Nadi sangam makes the temple and town very famous and sacred.

Thus famous in legends and history, this mokshapuri is luring thousands of devotees since aeons of ages, and lakha of people assemble on the Karthika Pournami day when a great festival is held on a grand scale.
Antiquity

Coming to the antiquity, it was due to Vindhya's deep penance that the place acquired spiritual eminence. It appears that the Vindhya Hills growing jealous of the splendour of the Mount Meru determined to outgrow it in height and sanctity. Knowing that penance is the only means to fulfill its ambition, it did penance, propitiating Lord Siva, the first and foremost God, easily accessible and infinitely merciful among gods. Lord Siva, when pleased with its tapas appeared to bestow boons. Granting its ambition of growing to any height, He cautioned it to extend veneration to Sivabhaktas always. And if contrary takes place, ruination overtakes with vengeance. Later events proved that the Vindhyas regardless of the warning, grew to enormous height to the extent of obstructing the movement of the Sun and Moon. And also dishonoured the request of ardent devotees to stop growing and allowing passage for the heavenly bodies to move, so that they could be freed from eternal darkness. Then came Agasthya, who craftily subdued it in a subtle way of asking it not rise its head till he returned. He never came that way, nor it grew later. The episode of his tapas occurred here. And the splitting of the Jyotirlinga into two Omkareswar and Amareswar also took place then at the soulful prayers of gods and sages. Hence its sanctity.

Secondly this holy place became highly congenial for meditation. In the caves of this great hill many maharshis did penance and made this into their permanent abode. The eminent Acharya Govinda Bhagavatpad lived here and produced a world renowned propounder of monist philosophy. Moreover, Mandhata's penance here gave the hill its present name. There lies an asram here called Mandhata aaram. It is said that the river Narmada after branching out into two, so formed into a shape resembling OM, and as it enshrines the Sivalinga in a temple on its bank and so the Lord is called Omkareswar.

The Temple

This island temple can be reached by boats from the township. There is also a bridge connecting the temple with the town. The temple containing the Omkareswar
Jyotirlinga is fairly a big one with high spires and is built in the North Indian style. There are other shrines dedicated to Sri Annapurna Devi and Panchamukha Ganapathy. The bathing ghats resembling those of famous Kasi facilitate easy bath for the visiting devotees. The shops and vendors supply the needed pooja materials. Of the many that meet the eye here, the countless granite Sivalingas of all sizes merit mention. They are of different sizes and sold in shops, on the pavements and all along the flight of stairs leading to temples. Almost all visitors buy them for worship in their houses, due to a fantastic belief current here. Sanctified by several holy occurrences, this place perches rightly a covetable place on the pilgrim map of India.

It is accessible by train or bus from Ujjain. And the nearest rail head is Mortakka and from there half an hour bus journey takes one to the temple direct.

Moving further towards the Arabian sea, we reach Somanath that immortal thirtha kshetra where Somanathalinga, standing the ravages of Mlechchas is backoning Bhaktakoti for showering mukti of any type.

12

SOMANATH - SOMANATH
JYOTIRLINGA

Uniqueness

Perhaps, no other temple in the history of our Akhand Bharat, or rather in the history of mankind, has been the target of attack and destruction, plunder and pillage; arson and annihilation by iconoclasts and alien expansionists as that of Somanath of Prabhas Pattana, situated on the southern coast of Sourashtra, in the province of Sorath, now known as Junagadh in the state of Gujarat. Its history is packed with an unending series of savage plunders and countless acts of barbarous vandalism, dating from the advent of Mohammed Gazani in 1026 and ending with its handing over to Indian Union on 9.11.1947 by Sir
Shanavas Bhutto, the then diwan of Junagadh. Records reveal that as many as 13 times, the temple was subjected to brutal attacks by Mlechchas. The tale of its defence is packed with indescribable pathos and unimaginable horrors. Although the spirit of religiosity rose up to unprecedented heights, it could not prevent and save the pious innocent beings mercilessly butchered; the old and infirm brutally trampled; children and disabled ruthlessly crushed and women openly raped and humiliated, besides converted, or carried to use as slaves, or turn into prostitutes. And the town was ransacked -- its precious movables were razed and mutilated beyond recognition.

Sure, the blood-stained hand of the iconoclasts can never regain its original colour, even if it is washed with the waters of all the oceans. Such incalculable harm was perpetrated on Hindus deliberately and systematically over nine long centuries. Even though the temple was brought to the ground level as many as 13 times, ironically, every time even before the fire was put out, or crashing sound hushed, it was rebuilt and renovated with innumerable additions that enhanced its glory. The immortal Linga started emerging the very next moment of the iconoclasts turning their backs on it, demonstrating to the world that the spirit of Hinduism is irrepressible, invincible and inexhaustible. Every time, either a local chief, or a distant theist emperor came forward with redoubled ardour and manifold resources to rebuild it in a way better, and design supreme.

Is it not then akin to Phoenix, the mythological bird that burns itself after living a full century on funeral, only to rise from the ashes, young and energetic to live another cycle? Does this not again divulge the truth that Hinduism is apratihata, apurva, ajeya, ananta, anadi, and its glorious career is ajaramara?

It is believed that celebrated Rishis and divine Sages entered the Linga, and it was worshipped in different kalpas by different names. To the Vedic Rishis, it was Kalagnirudra, and later it was called by many names such as, Bairavanatha, Panchamukha Siva, Mrityunjaya, Amritesa,
Krittivasa and Hansa Nanda in the periods followed. According to legends, Lord Siva has been present in this thirtha, since the beginning and will remain so for ever.

Antiquity

The story begins with the solemnisation of marriage of Soma with 27 lovely daughters of Daksha Prajapati. Rohini, the buxom beauty of the charming bevy held greater hold on Soma. Smitten by Savati matsara, the sorrowing 26 complained to the father about their miserable lot. Daksha in the capacity of father-in-law chastised him. Soma assured equal attention to all and would give no occasion for future discontentment, but only to break it the next moment. Thereupon, Daksha cursed him to lose his lustere and be like a block of dull black stone. Though Soma lost his lustere, it did not diminish his infatuation for Rohini. This was too much for Daksha; upset by this, he bade the deadly Rajyaksha disease enter his body and reduce his vigour and vitality. It worked. Caught in its grip, he grew thinner and paler day by day; and it had disastrous effect on vegetation. It started withering, bringing in its wake slow death to plants, birds, beasts and people. Finding the calamity, the compassionate Rishi prayed to Daksha for immediate solution. Soma too implored for forgiveness, but he regretted saying that he was incapable of undoing the done. He then advised Soma to worship Maheswar at a spot, where the river Saraswati meets the sea.

As advised, Soma forthwith descended at Prabhas pattana, where Saraswati meets the sea and worshipped the Sparasalinga of Somanath of the size of an egg. And did penance for 4000 years. Pleased with Soma's austerity and penance, Sadasiva appearing said that He could not remove the effects of curse totally, but would lift it partially. According to it, he would wane for a fortnight and wax during the rest of the month. As Soma regained Prabha -- lustre at this place it was called Prabhasa Pattana. Soma then made a humble supplication that the Lord must be called by the name of his devotee Soma -- the Moon. Hence Somanath. Further, He should be his
Kuladevata. And so Maheswar is called Somanath since then. Soon Soma was advised and initiated by Brahma Himself to erect a shrine for Siva. In addition, Brahma then cleft open the earth and lifted a shining Swayambhu Linga - Jyotirlinga of the size of an egg covered with honey and darbha grass with a Brahmasila over it. The Linga thus taken out was installed by Brahma Himalef.

Several other anecdotes too bring out the outstanding sanctity and glory of this Kshetra. It is here Dadhichi made an exemplary sacrifice; and it is much-quoted, and oft-repeated episode. Once it appears the gods entrusted their weapons to Dadhichi for safety, with a promise to collect them at a fixed date, but did not. Dadhichi, deciding to repair to Himalayas for penance found it difficult to carry them. So he drank their essence by coverting them into liquid. Later, when Devendra came for arms to fight against demons, Dadhichi suggested to kill him and use his bones as arms. Devendra did as bid. Learning the tragic death of his father, Pishpala, as a true son did penance and got Badabanalaagni to take revenge on gods. Gods, in order to save themselves took recourse to a strategy. In accordance with it, Saraswati would carry that Kalagni to hand over to him. As planned, she deposited it in the sea before giving it to him near Prabhasa Pattana. That strategy was carried out and it saved the gods.

Many of the episodes relating to the lives of Yadavas and Pandavas, particularly that of Sri Krishna, Subhadra, Balarama, Arjuna and other principal characters took place here in Dwaparayuga. Moreover, Lakulisa considered to be the avatara of Siva, visited this place after entering another man's body through parakaya pravesam and performed penance. He settled down here and taught sastras to a choice group of students and became a great Siddha. It is said that he, who prays to the image of Lakulisa here on the Karthika Pournami is promised of abundant wealth enough for seven births. Realising the holiness hovering over here, Agasthya preferred the celebration of his marriage with Lopamudra.
here. Yudhistira, during his yatra performed pujas here, fasting completely for 12 days with Droupadi. Here one can see five sakaras - Saraswati river, Somagraha, Samudra, Swayambhu Jyotirlinga and Soma i.e. Lord Siva with Uma, His consort. Many Siddhas adepts in the Pasupata yoga flourished in the past here.

The Temple Complex

The present temple with its imposing exterior adorned with marvellous sculpture and a grand Sabha Mantap in front, and a huge sikhara atop measuring 155 feet in height casts a spell on pilgrims even from miles afar. It faces East and has a lovely garden to its right extending up to the high compound wall acting as dyke along the Arabian sea. Pilgrims enter through the Digvijaya Dwar, a piece of architectural beauty that detains them longer with its majesty and decor. The Jyotirlinga installed on the Brahmasila is about 4 feet in height and affords a royal banquet to the eye with its sandal paste decor\'ation, which is a novelty here. Imbibing its beauteous splendour, the devotees close their eyes for a while when Somanath of the ancient times installed by Brahma flashes across their minds and recounts His former glory. There were 1000 priests in His service attending to several activities round the clock. During its heyday, the temple was beautified with invaluable golden ornaments, the garbha griha was lighted by jewelled lamps and a grand bell was rung during the harati with a chain of solid gold of 250 maund in weight. It had hundreds of giant sized vaults stuffed with rare jewels, and the pillars inside were studded with gems. No wonder, it ignited the lust and greed in the hearts of unscrupulous Mlechchas, who raided it again and again.

Going down further to the state of Maharastra, we arrive at Triyambak, to feast the Triyambakeswar at the Brahmagiri near Panchavati sprayed by the holy water of the river Gautami.
NASIK - TRIYAMBAKESWAR
JYOTIRLINGA

Uniqueness

The origin of the Triyambakeshwar temple, and emergence of the Brahmagiri hill and the township of Triyambak near Nasik have a fantastic background and awe-some legend. The temple enshrines one of the Dwadsa Jyotirlingas and has a long history of its own. And it commands veneration by virtue of possessing several uniques features that have been drawing theists in large numbers since time immemorial. It is here Sage Gautama was absolved of his sin of killing a cow by bathing in the Ganga, brought to Brahmagiri by Siva; it is to this Kahetra all the gods come once in every twelve years; it is here Ganga turns its course due to placing a blade of dharbha by Gautama and took the name of Gautami or Godavari; it is in the vicinity of this thirtha kahetra there lies Panchavati, where Sri Rama lived when in exile; it is here exists several ancient temples housing many gods; it is this territory that witnessed the scene of Surpanaka’s adamant wooing of Rama and Lakshmana one after another and losing ears and nose that gave the place the name of Nasika - nose which was later Anglicised as Nasik; it is in this region lie the Pandu Lena Buddhist caves; it is here exist many kunds named after the divinities and famous for Asthinimajjjan-immersion of bones and also offering pindas to manes; it is this thirtha kahetra classed as one of the five centres of pilgrimage of all India importance; it was this place that served as the second capital for Maharatra rulers; it is in this region lies Janasthana, where celebrated rishis like Agasthya lived, and finally it was here in a cave called Gumph in the hills lived Gorakhnath, the founder of the Nath sampradaya that played a great role in the religious history of Maharatra.
The Antiquity

There are many legends about this place. Here are the major ones. The story goes that Brahma and Vishnu were discussing the place of Siva among the Trimurthis. As they proceeded, a long and unending series of pictures of Siva’s glory and the countless lilas He demonstrated sailed into their ken, and as such His image grew endlessly. Brahma fancied then to find out the ‘adi’ and ‘anata’ of His Viratarupa. When suggested, Vishnu accepted to go downwards to find out the bottom, whereas Brahma to go upwards to find out the top. Forthwith, Vishnu assuming the form of Varaha started digging to reach the feet -- the bottom portion. He dug and dug - endless and timeless, but could not. Deciding to confess His inability, He returned. In the meanwhile Brahma, who went upward riding his mount -- Swan felt thoroughly exhausted and determined to return and admit His failure to reach the top. Just then He saw a Ketaki flower coming down. He sought her help to give false evidence in His favour. It accepted. Brahma then lied to Vishnu of His finding the top. Devendra and others disbelieved Him. So they approached Siva, who reaching the scene with ungovernable anger proclaimed that Brahma was liar, and so He should go without temple and worship in the world; for, if a liar were to be let off -- go scot free, there would be total chaos. His curse met with a counter; for, Brahma too rising to the occasion said in a diction equally of vehement that SIVA would be hurled down to Bhuloka and remain in the form of mountain; for, he said that anger is no solution to any problem, and if it is not kept under control the result would be as disastrous as the lie that upsets the normalcy in the general scheme of working, when planets would go out the orbits, resulting in everything ending in chaos. A curse if once uttered runs its course and can never go waste, so no temples were built for Brahma. And for Siva, He found Himself laying in the form of mountain near Tryambak. Later, after passing off; the wave of anger, Siva was pleased to associate Himself with Brahma in His mountain form; for, both as the highest gods diverted from the righteous course. Hence the
mountain is called thenceforth as the Brahmagiri — a standing testimony of the effect of lie and anger.

The Legend of Godavari

This legend is still more fantastic, and is the longest, perhaps for the characters involved in this are numerous, and time it encircled too is many yugas. It begins with Brahma’s striking his axe at Prayaga to preparing a sacrificial altar in the presence of devas and manavas for performing a sacrifice for Viswasreyas. The axe unearthed a chest. A lady of unparalleled beauty and myriad charms emerged, when it was opened. Her bewitching beauty was so hypnotising that everyone among the assembled — gods, sages, kings, warriors wanted to marry her. To averting the disaster, Brahma declared that, he who returned first making a bhupradakshana — going round the earth, would be eligible to marry her. At once, there began a marathon race with every biped participating. Among them, there was Sage Gautama. Although he aspired for that unearthly lady, he was no match with the mighty, healthy, weighty men participating. When lagging behind, he saw a black cow giving birth to a calf. Going round it thrice, he came back to Brahma, and by quoting the scriptural authority, claimed the lady. Brahma could not brush aside his request; for, it is specifically said that going round a cow during the delivery of a calf tantamounts to going round the earth. So, the wedding was solemnised. Just then the contestants returned and found that the much coveted praise went to Gautama. Bowing to the verdict, they departed. Gautama at the instance of Brahma reached Brahmagiri and lived with Ahalya that was the name given to her in an asram built in the vicinity.

It is at this time, Mother Parvathi met with a problem. Finding her Lord’s clandestine liaison with Ganga, she desired to get rid of her. When confided to Vinayaka, her eldest son he suggested to cut off Siva’s jatas, the seat of Ganga for solution. Mother Parvathi resented at it; for, her Lord would be deformed if done so. Then they took recourse to a strategem — sending out Ganga through
human agency. Vinayaka with the aid of Varuna created an artificial famine on earth everywhere, except near Gautam's asram. So all ascetics came to his asram for shelter. He happily accepted to play host. It went on for years. During then, one day, by chance he drove out a cow eating away grain in his asram with a bunch of Kusa grass. It died as planned by Vinayaka and his party. So he was charged with killing of cow -- a grave sin. To be absolved of it, only Gangasana was prescribed. Anon he began penance invoking Siva's grace. Yugas passed. He stood against several attempts of seduction even by Mother Parvathi sending her maid Jatika to distrub his penance, seeing the celestial beauties returned crest -- fallen. Gautama's austerity brought Siva down. When Gautama was asked to name his intention, he expressed that Mother Ganga should come down from her place and flow here to enabling him bathe in her for getting absolved of the sin of gohatya. Gratified, he bade Ganga to flow down. Though unwilling to leave her Lord, Ganga started flowing. Gautama bathed in it and was cleaned of his sin. Thenceforth, Ganga was called Gautami after the originator. At the earnest request of Mahars~his Lord Siva accepted to abide in this place as Jyotirlinga. The Mother Parvathi thus got rid of her savati for ever. It did inestimable help to the land; for, Ganga with her perennial flow turned the deserted land into fertile soil, feeding thereby millions of people with bumper crops raised on either side of its course, covering hundreds of miles. Godavari descended thus on the 10th of the bright half of Magha during the reign of King Mandhata established for itself a highly coveted place among the rivers, and its basin gave asylum to several human species, who brought immortal fame to Mother Bharat. Now remains the visit to the temple of Triyambakeswar.

The Temple

The Triyambakeshwar temple enshrining one of the twelve jyotirlingas is quite magnificent and built on the Indo-Aryan style. Its imposing dimensions, architectural adornments are quite befitting of its eminence. It is
surrounded by a massive stone wall pierced by two dwaras and covers 260 x 220 feet area. It is built in black stone by Balaji Baji Rao between 1760 -- 1761 on the old site, which of course, was very modest in size and sculpture. Tall dipmalas adorn the Mahadwara on either side. In front of the temple, a beautifully sculptured bull -- Nandi is installed in a cupola. Another marble one is found inside. To the eastern most part lies a square mantap of huge proportions. It has doors on all sides and its porches are decorated with cusped arches and moulded pillars. Then comes the antarala lying between garbha griha and big mantap. The garbha griha is vast and well decorated with architectural designs and carvings of figures, of humans animals, yakshas, floral desings and the like. A graceful spire with curvilinear design rises from atop the garbha griha and heightens its beauty with a dazzling Kalash. In the central part of the garbha griha there lies the swayambhhu Jyotirlinga. It has a minute crack from which emerges the water i.e. Ganga drips forth constantly, round the clock and throughout the year. Tradition has that some times flames emerge from this, and also deep sounds of thunder not unlike the roar of a lion now and then. The linga is covered with a golden mask adorned with five faces and a dazzling golden crown, donated by Peshwa Sadasiva Rao, and was supposed to have been brought from Delhi. It was an invaluable gift of the King of Mysore to a temple there, but carried away by Moghul iconoclasts during their raids. This is used on ceremonial occasions only; and for daily purpose, a silver made, single faced mask in used. The remarkable feature found here is, the prevalence absolute quieteness not found elsewhere. After offering prayers with rituals, the devotees emerge souls filled with the divinity pervading the entire garbha griha.

After prayers to this Lord, we move parallel to the east to availing the darsan of Gushmeswara Linga near Aurangabad in the State of Maharastra.
AURANGABAD - GHUSHMESWAR JYOTILINGA

Background

The Ghushmaneswara Jyotirlinga is claimed to exist in two places – one at Devagiri near the famous Ellora caves, and the other at Ellora Kailasa temple itself. Moreover, there are various versions of the name itself, such as Kusumeswara Jyotirlinga, Grushmaneswara Jyotirlinga and Grishneswara Jyotirlinga. Location may change, names may vary but the sports played and boons bestowed by that Omnibenevolent Siva are as immutable as the Pranava itself. Legends having woven with the humanist view of lifting the dukhartis, many places claim the honour of Lord's appearance for deliverance and emancipation. The only thing to be looked for is, whether it is a Swayambhu - self manifested linga or Sthapitha - installed by humans. Above all, whether the Sivalilas displayed are in concurrence with the accounts embodied in the Puranas are to be examined, lest concoction gets incorporated as some selfish men may start trading in spiritualism and amass wealth or fame. Even though the sthalapuranas are incompatible with the mythologies, we can enter straight away the shrines for offering prayers and getting His anugrah for carefree existence in this world. Isn't He permeating the whole Cosmos?

Agreeing with the claim that Ghushmaneswara or Kusmeswaralinga is one of the Jyotirlingas and installed in the Devagiri temple, let us glean a few facts of its origin and the sports Siva played here. Puranas recount that once a devout brahmin lived here. He lived with a difference i.e. he dedicated his whole life to Lord Siva. His integrity and reliogiety were the models to the people in that region, and so they held him in high esteem. He was a married man, blessed with a wife, noted for her self-will and strong emotions; yet she did her grihakrityas to the family members and pleased her husband in cooperating with his daily pujas etc. Unluckily she did not
beget children -- not even one to see the family tree grow and bear fruit. Her barrenness would make the family line come to an abrupt end. Being an orthodox brahmin, and prevailed upon by elders and well-wishers, he married a second time, only for santanaprapti, particularly a son, who releases him form the aputra naraka -- sin of sonlessness.

His second wife, Kusuma by name was a replica of the Hindu woman -- she is sahadharmacharini in word and action. And in devotion, she excelled her husband reputed for Sivaaradhana. Not satisfied with offering of worship to Sivalinga, she was making one Sivalinga for prayers everyday and immersing it in the holy tank nearby. She won the appreciation of all the members of the family, besides encomiums from the society. Siva was so pleased with her chastity and spirituality, that He blessed her a boy. And he was named Supriya. He lived upto his auspicious name. Kusuma's honour mounted higher for perpetuating the family line without unpleasant termination. Alas it stung her sister -- the first wife of the brahmin. She nursed grudge, and indirectly started teasing her Savati - Kusuma now and then. Godly natured Kusuma, uncared for such pinpricks continued her spiritual activities undisturbed, and that was what she longed for more, and cared most.

Twenty years rolled by thus, and then time came for the wedding or her son. All were rejoicing at the trials, and the efforts going to solemnise the boy's wedding fittingly. But the devil jealousy that was tormenting the first wife silently for two decades hit her badly. That cobra's sting turned deadly and killed the boy with an axe one night mercilessly - an act that plunged the whole family in endless grief and eternal shame. The sorrowing mother, despite crushed to powder by the dead weight of putrasoka was offering regular pujas to the Sivalinga in the usual manner and going to the tank to immerse it. Surprise of surprises. No sooner did she drop the linga into water, one day than there arose over the sparkling ripples of the water her son. She was stupified along with the spectators, who gathered when she cried in joy. Her tears
of joy drenched her son, when bent low at her feet for blessings.

Just at that happy union of mother and son to the wonderment of all, there appered Lord Siva with smiling face and moving Abhayahastham. And related the whole story of the crooked envy of the first wife and disappeared saying that the place where the Sivalingas were immersed every day would turn into a temple of great significance, and He would abide in it in His Jyotirlingaswarupa. The devout prayers would bear fruits beyond expectation, and He would bless one and all. The temple was named after Kusuma, the Ksetra Kusumeswaram.

This reputed Saiva Ksetra enshrining that sacred Jyotirlinga is near Aurangabad and it was renovated by Rani Ahalyabai recently. Here the Sivaaradhana is being conducted since that auspicious moment in the dim past according to Saivagamas. The other claims for the places of Jyotirlinga too have their own legends, but this one is approved by scholars as that Jyotirlinga Kshetra where this pious episode took place.

Lord Bhimashankar abiding in Sahyadri hills awaits our visit next, where the formidable demon Tripura was laid low by the Lord with the assistance of Mother Parvathi accompanied by Sakini and Danimi, the chiefs of the Bhutaganas.

SAHYADRI – BHIMASANKAR
JYOTIRLINGA

Uniqueness

Contradictions or no contradictions; agreement reached or not; verdict passed gains credibility or not; posterity either accepts or does not; it is as true as histroy that Bhimashankar has been abiding at Bhimasankar for centuries, though Puranas are at variance with regard to its location and times.
Brushing aside the claims, like that the real Bhimashankar is enshrined is the Kamarupa country i.e. the present Assam, and not the one found at Bhuvanagiri village in the Poona district of Maharastra state; or it is in that Dakini country now in the Nainital district, but not this one in Maharastra, and leaving such arguments to ivory tower pundits, if we enter the hill temple at Bhimashankar, the All -- compassionate Lord Siva gleams into our sight and fills our souls with anugraha infinite, making our countenances beam with joy inexplicable. The Mulavirat of the temple, situated atop the Sahyadri hill temple is one of the Dwadasa Jyotrilingas and has a glittering past and ineffable glory. This archamurthi has had a splendid past and is conceived of taking rest after Tripurantaka samghara, on granting the request of His staying here to the gods, who congregated to pour out their ecstatic joy over the death of that lokakantaka and to express thier gratitude. It is indeed magnificent to look at Him though His form that was roudra in its intensity and strength in totality. It has many other plus points that have been luring Saivates in particular and theists in general since that act of killing Tripura for universal peace. It is here the sweat drops of the Lord were converted into a steam which is flowing since then perennially under the name of Bhimarati; it is at this temple Mother Gowri is worshipped as Kamalaja indicating thereby that she was worshipped with lotuses by Brahma; it is here lies the Mokshakund that liberates seven generations of the forefathers of the person bathed; it is here lie several other sacred thirthas created by Dattatreya and Bhaashitadevi; it is here lived the famous rishi Jabali; it is here located shrines for Sakini and Dakini, who helped Lord Bhimasankar in his war against Tripura; it is this temple built by two bankers unlike by kings and it is here the Lokabhyanyakar Tripurasura met his death at the hands of Lord Sankar. Let us have a look at its antiquity.

Antiquity

Its hoary past begins with a dreadful demon by name Tripura, Lord of three cities, whose unquenchable
samrajyakanksha was quite uncommon and that indeed became the chief cause of Lord Siva’s taking roudra aspect and killing him under the name of Bhimasankar. It happened — Tripura was an asura with a difference. He owned three Nagaras of amazing potentialities that they could fly and descend like birds at his will. Though over ambitious and power intoxicated, he did not adopt demonic acts for the conquest of universe, though his infinite potentialities could materialise anything and everything at any time with a mere trifle. He differed from his predecessors or even successors for that matter. Desiring to be blessed with invincibility, he propitiated Lord Brahma and started penance on the mount Meru standing on one leg with hands raised above his head for years and as such he become a Vayubhakshaka, simple and total. Naturally Devendra was upset; presuming that it was directed against Devendrapadavi, and with a view to nip it in the bud, he met Lord Brahma and solicited His counsel, appealing to Him to ward off the lokas from the impending calamity. When Lord Brahma appeared, the demon immersed in his rigid penance, asked for three boons — first, he should be invincible — none form surasuras or manavas should kill him; second, he was to be blessed with Kamagamana — power to travel anywhere he liked — under water or in the ether; third, his three cities must be made impregnable. Granting all the desired, Brahma said that he would meet his death at the hands of one, who with a single hit would destroy his three puras. Power — mad and overjoyed asura, deeming that one was next to impossibility accepted the condition laid.

The boons of his invincibility and the impregnability of his cities emboldened him infinitely and so he started abusing his powers. With the turning of head, he turned upside down of everything held sacred, laudable and live-worthy hitherto. His launching on a campaign turned out all successful and installed him as the Lord of universe which ended in making Devendra await his bidding. In conformity with asurapalana, the Vedic rites were discarded; ascetics dishonoured; hermitages destroyed, and yagna yagas discontinued. The woe-struck people fled, and mother Earth
wailed unable to bear the burden of the injustice dancing naked everywhere -- Dharma reached the lowest ebb. The afflicted approached Lord Siva with the supplication for His instant intervention. The enormity of ignominy brought to Dharma devata and destruction thrust upon the people moved Him. Promising to taking up cudgel against Tripurasura, Lord Siva sent them away.

Assuming a gigantic form and putting on the aspect of roudra, He entered the battle field followed by His army of ganas including yogins, like Sakini and Dakini in their fiercest forms. Tripura rushed with his hordes. It was a terrible war when the Lord was constrained to assert like Bhima and fought with an unprecedented valour and superabundant strength. The contest as it went on, became so dreadful that the earth trembled and Adisesha found it hard to holding it on his head. The fiercest exchange of arms atlast ended with Tripura's three cities falling to pieces hit by the potent Trisul, heralding the death of Tripura. With the opening of the third eye of the Lord he was burnt in flames. The exertion was so great that Bhimasankar sat down for a while with perspiration enveloping His whole body. At once all the gods hastened to thank Him for the greatest relief given and hailed His heroism. Pleased with their praises, He asked them what else they wished to be granted then and there. They with one voice prayed to the Lord to remain there in that form for adoration. And the streaming sweat should be converted into an eternal stream for bath. Flashing a smile He said 'Yes'. Thus emerged the abode of Lord Siva on the Sahyadri and the river was called Bhima after Bhimasankar. And since then, they became indispensable objects of veneration.

The Temple

The temple of Bhimashankar is built atop the Sahyadri hill near a village of the same name. The old temple is of modest dimensions, not bigger than forty five by twenty feet and has a portico, antarala and garbhagriha. The Sivalinga installed with yoni in the garbha griha is at a much lower level than the gound outside. So one has
to descend a few steps to reach it. It was discovered by a wood-cutter, when started cutting a tree with his axe one day. At the first stroke itself there gushed out blood from the tree. Quite bewildered, he brought his cow and milked it against the bleeding tree; for, he once heard such story when the cow’s milk stopped the bleeding. Miraculously the bleeding was stopped, but to his great astonishment, he found on the next day a Sivalinga on the spot, where the tree stood. As he was a god-minded man, he began offering worship. He built a small temple around the Swayambhu Sivalinga and with the passage of time it attracted devotees and developed in all dimensions. Ritualistic prayers and festivals were introduced later. This incident happened around 1350 A.D. Later in the eighteenth century, it developed into dasadiswas with the advent of one great bhakta by name Chimaji, a resident of Poona.

The present new temple is quite big and built on the Indo-Aryan styles bearing resemblance to a Jain shrine. It was a square mandap in front of the garbha griha, which is adorned with artistic embellishments like ornamental door frame; elegant pillars and murals. Many sculptural adornments resembling the figures of similar ones at Navas and Toke are superb and are heightening the grandeur of the temple. The sikhara is small in size but its superb artistry is adding grace to the whole structure. Offering ritualistic worship we come out to visit some other important shrines adjoining the temple. The shrines dedicated to Kamalaja, Sakini and Dakini who helped the Lord during the war deserve visitation and they are in the vicinity and are installed in befitting manner. Situated up above the high hill and amidst the thick forest, this temple though modest in proportions, its past enthralles the visitors. Hence the unending streams of devotees throughout the year.

Our next leg of tour takes us to Parli, where the Lord despite beaten by Ravana and Baiju, His devout adorers with their dreadful clubs, is emancipating the theists with unbounded compassion.
PARLI - THE VAIDYANATH JYOTIRLINGA

God, the supreme wants His children to adhere to certain principles of discipline; develop a sense dedication and devotion even to the wrong causes; for, when wisdom dawns, of course at the end, the transgressor – defaulter, openly confessing, tread the righteous path, strewn with lilies and roses that certainly coveys him to the paradise of plenty of eternal beatitude. Sincerity pays, tenacity wins and dedication succeeds to their own boundless satisfaction. There are countless instances of God’s unqualified appreciation of tenacity and sincerity. Doesn’t showering of boons on demons for deep penance illustrate this? Although the instances are numerous and beneficiaries are countless, there is nothing that greets the mortal eyes standing in proof of gods rewarding the tenacity applied to wrong cause or impudence persisted consistently. But the solitary temple of Vaidyanath at Parli, perhaps the only one that is perpetuating this truth. Here the Siva Linga bears on its head the marks of impiety perpetrated by one pious but ignorant devotee, and the Lord prefers to be called after the name of that devotee.

Uniqueness

The sacred shrine enshrining the Sivalinga with the marks of club on the top lies in Parli and it is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas adored over centuries by people in their laces. Surprisingly enough, many places in India are claiming this honour; and strange to hear they are also called Vaidyanath temples. And at each place, the sthalagnas - local guides narrate elaborate accounts and corroborate them with some evidence or the other. Among them, the temple at Deogarh in the Santhal pargans in Bengal is one, another at Gangakhed in Maharashtra, one more at Kiragram in Punjab, and yet one more at Dakhoi are a few others that are laying claims and worshiping the Sivalingas of those places as one of the twelve Jyotirlingas. And the story narrated about its origin too more or less
is similar and concurs in the essential aspects, like the Sivalinga was brought here by Ravana and given to him by Lord Siva Himself. The deity is called Vaidya - surgeon, for the act of transplanting the nine heads of Ravana severed by him to obtain boons. Each is a Saiva kshetra redolent of Sivalilas. Festivals like Mahasivaratri are celebrated with great éclat, when thousands of devotees congregate and offer several kinds of pujas. The thrithas of the places are connected with Ravana and their efficacy is still felt, when bathed, and hence they are luring pilgrims round the year since the Treta yuga.

Antiquity

The Sivalinga of Vaidyanath is a gift of Lord Maheswar and it was granted after vigorous penance and exhibition of deep faith and devotion to him by Ravanabrahma. According to Kotirudra Samhita, Ravana desired to make Lankarajya invincible, and the danava race immortal. He knew that Maheswar alone could bless him with the fulfilment of his desires and He alone would be easily won over by penance and prayers. Accordingly he went to Kailas and started penance. When it could not yield the desired, he began cutting his heads one after another and throwing them into agnikund as oblation. Without remorse nor expression of anguish, his persistance went on till he offered nine heads. Before severing the tenth, the Lord appeared and said, "I am indeed pleased with your devotion, ask anything and it will be granted anon". Waiting only for this, he asked for the Atmalingam that could ensure immortality to the adorers and invincibility to the place of its occupation. Lord Maheswar, the Omni--compassionate without forethought or insight granted it on the spot. Together with it, pitying at the loss of nine heads, he resorted them. And so, once again he became Dasakanth--ten--headed Ravana. As the cut off heads were once again joined to the body, as if by skilful plastic surgery and transplantation by an expert doctor -- Vaidya, Lord Maheswar was addressed by Ravana as Vaidyanath -- Prince of doctors. Seeing him lost in ecstatic raptures, Lord Maheswar advised him to carry it home
without putting on earth till he reached his kingdom. Promising to abide by the condition, Ravana started homewards holding the linga in hands with piety.

But for gods, Ravana's obtaining the Atmalinga and becoming mightier by the boons posed a problem. Sure Ravana would besiege heaven and torture them. So they became nervous. They at once resorted to strategy to foil his efforts of installing the Sivalinga in Lanka. Accordingly Lord Mahavishnu taking the form of a brahmin met him on the way, when Ravana developed all on a sudden some stomach trouble urging him to ease out at once; for, according to the strategy, Varuna the Lord of Rain entered his body and worked out commotion in the bowels. Treating the chance meeting of brahmin at that juncture, as a bolt from the blue, he requested the latter to hold the Sivalinga for a short while, so that he could attend to the calls of nature. The brahmin agreed, but before Ravana made a few steps forward, deposited it on the ground saying that it was too heavy to be held it any longer. And he disappeared before Ravana reached the spot. Infuriated Ravana cursing his fate crossly, tried to lift it but could not. Used his physical strength, courted failure, employed asurasakti, failed again. He pulled it up and thrust it down, shook it sidewards and tried all ways, but the goal could not be sighted even. In his utter desperation, he determined to break it and so applied his heavy club to it. Alas, only a chip flew out from the top, when all his energy, patience, tenacity were spent out, he then resorted to prayers -- started Jalabhishek with waters from a pond, he materialised and filled it with waters of all the sacred rivers of the earth. After that he left for Lanka, grumbling, but he visited often for worship.

The Baiju Episode

The Atmalinga popular as Ravaneswara linga thus left there was adored even after his death, by devotees for long, but later in the Kaliyuga, the slothful priests grown impious due to amassing wealth by easy means, abandoned worshipping it. A cattle-keeper by name Baiju, who was regularly worshipping it with utmost piety, found
this lapse unbearable. But he could do nothing due to his low position. In a fit of anger he vowed to break it to pieces with his heavy club for the sole purpose of opening the eyes of the erring priests. He tried but could not make any dent; for the Sivalinga was impregnable. Being adament, he resolved to breaking it little by little as a dialy routine way. He decided to implement his plan before meal everyday. He put his resolution into practice. Before taking food, he was using all his strength on the Sivalinga with his club, but it remained stubborn -- not a chip came out of it. Yet he continued. One day in hurry he forgot it and sat down for food; but before raising his hand to mouth, he remembered his vow. Dropping it, he dashed off and with uncontrollable anger, he struck it with all strength at his command. The Lord pleased more with the tenacity than devotion, which was of no mean distinction, appeared before him to fulfilling his ardent ambition of offering regular prayers to the linga with due agamic rites. The overjoyed cowherd prostrated before Him. The Lord lifting him said that the presiding deity would be called Baijnath after him thenceforward. The priests realising their position corrected their ways and commenced performing pujas with ardour due.

Our journey halts at Srisailam, where the Lord with mere darsan of the tower of his abode is ensuring the asthikas with the much coveted birthlessness.

17

**SRISAILAM - MALLIKARJUNA JYOTIRLINGA**

**Uniqueness**

The very reminiscene of Srisailam strikes the ears with a melody of hymnal music, recalling to the mind a wide variety of enchanting Sivalillas that send thrills in the spines, while the souls feel wafted towards the mount Kailas unknown to themselves. Meandering along its picturesque zigzag mountain path, if the devotee sights the tall, imposing temple tower even from miles afar, he enjoys
the thrill of attaining the Sayujiya Mukti, and involuntarily utters 'Harahara Mahadev' that marks the consummation of his life-long ambition of seeing that holiest of the holy thirtha kshetra, luring lacs of theists of all denominations since the ageless time. As this sacred kshetra enshrines one of the Dwadasa Jyotirlingas, and reverentially called the Linga Chakravarthi by the Jangama Priests, in addition to being one of the eighteen principal Saktipithas with Bramarambika worshipped as the manifestations of Sakti; it is deemed one of this much - sought after centres of pilgrimage for both Sakteyas and Saivates since the Kritayuga. As the divinity hovering over this Mokshapuri is lifting many god -- intoxicated, ever since Lord Maheswar at the request of bhaktas made this sacred hill as his permanent seat to liberating the Saranagathas in the too distant past, the pious terrestrials made the celestials descend down by their penance. It is one of the eight Sthanas of Lord Siva, who came down here to appease the causeless anger of his youngest son Subrahmanya, staying here and made it later his eternal abode, captivated by the unusual glory and picturesqueness of this lovely hills, shining like an emerald amidst the thick growth of primeval forests and to give succour to the devotees.

And it is here the devout princess Chandravathi worshipped Lord Siva with jasmine flowers that gave the august name of Mallikarjuna - white jasmine to the presiding deity of the temple; it is with a mere darshan of the sikhara of this shrine, one is released from the cycle of births and deaths; "Srisaila Sikkra Drushtvat Punarjanma Nalabhyate"; it is this region visited by Lord Siva once on hunting expedition with a chosen few of His Pramadaganas, when His chance acquaintance with a local Chenchu dameel consummated in wedlock, and so endearingly called Chenchu Mallayya by Chenchu tribe.

The Kshetra and The Temple

The sthalapurana gives an elaborate account of this Srisaila kshetra covering a very wide area 30' x 30 amadas with four entrances -- Tripurantakam in the East,
Siddavatam in the South, Alampuram in the West and Umamaheswaram in the North, encompassing in its wide area as many as nine holy peaks, nine rivers, nine caves, nine towns, nine wells and nine Matapeetas. Skandapurana devotes as many on 12,500 slokas to bring about the glory of this famous Saivakshetra, besides the Vedas and Epics grew eloquent in description of this. The sacred shrine atop the hill of 1500 feet above sea level, looking like the crest jewel of the Nallamalai hills is looking upon the holy river Krishna called Patalaganga here.

It is encircled by a high massive outer prakara with a six feet wide wall on all four sides, measuring 2120 feet in length and raises to an average height of 20 feet with three gateways -- the Northern one called Sivaji gopuram; the Southern, Harihar gopuram, and the Eastern Krishna Devaraya. The inner walls adorned with bas-reliefs depict a wide variety of sculptures -- the bottom row with the carvings of battle scenes and wild animals, while the upper row portraying the Sivalilas, including the Chandravathi story, episodes of Sagaramadanam, Siva Parvathi Kalyanam, Arjuna’s penance etc. It is estimated that a total number of 3200 stones, each weighing a ton are used for the exterior alone. The image of Ashtabhairavas are installed in the corners. As it is customary to enter the temple through the main gate, let us enter through the Rajagopuram constructed by Sri Krishna Devaraya.

The main temple dedicated to Mallikarjuna is in the centre facing the east. The Jyotirlinga, installed in the garbha griha is Swayambhu--self manifested and the Lord is abiding at the request of the Princess Chandravathi. Any devotee can offer puja to the linga without a priest. And restriction of any kind like age, sex, caste, creed, religion etc., are totally eliminated. A unique feature. A rare privilege. And a commendable reform establishing thereby the exemplary catholocity -- a much -- needed change, though ardently craved for, is rarely extended by authorities or traditions.

This novelty, as the word goes is due to the impact of Buddhism that held its sway during Acharya Nagarjuna’s
period. Another oddity discernable is, the priests here are Jangama Lingayats, testifying to the fact that the temple was managed and dominated by Virasaivas for long, though the administration was in the hands of Pushpagiri Brahmans. The sacred shrine is quite imposing in architectural design with Garbha griha, Mukha mantap, Ranga mantap and Virasaiva mantap. The Vimana and Sikhara with dazzling kalasam atop and adorned by images of Nandis on all sides make a grand appeal, and the sculptural adornments lift the souls of the devotees. The monolithic Nandi installed opposite the Sivalinga is huge in size and goes by the name of Sanagalabasavanna.

In the first prakara adjacent to this lies Brahmaramba’s shrine, facing East. It is so built to be straight opposite the main temple that the sight of the Mother falls on the Sivalinga. The image resembles Durga and reveals in Santha Swarupa. The Vimana on the garbhagrihas has a golden Kalasa and the sublimity hovering over there bends the heads in reverence. Next to this lies a big size Sahastralinga with well-carved thousand miniature lingas on all sides, surrounded by a three-headed Naga. The old Mallikharjuna shrine is situated a little north of the Mukhadwara, and it also lures all the devotees with its legend. In this prakara there are many more images and shrines worthy of visitation. Another queer object that wrings veneration is the Tripala Vriksha a combination of three trees - Medi, Juvvi and Ravi. Underneath it, there is a mantap, and a raised dais around. It is here Dattatreya did tapas and achieved his object; so it goes by the name of Dattatreya Vriksham. The image of Veerabhadraswamy, the guardian deity of this place adorned with 32 hands compels attention. One can spend hours imbibing the sublimity emanating from several places of worship, beautified with rare sculptural adornments, if time permits and taste impels.

Finally we reach the seashore temple at Rameswaram, where the Ramalingeswara Jyotirlinga installed by Bhagawan Rama is conferring all that is desired and craved for.
Uniqueness

The island temple of Lord Siva called Ramanathaswamy Aalayam embodies a kind of charm irresistible; glory ineffable; and appeal, inexhaustible, that very few temples come nearer to it either in spiritual wealth or sculptural opulence. Situated at the extreme south eastern point of the Indian peninsula, this temple of Rameswaram occupies geographically, culturally and spiritually a much-coveted place among the four reputed Dhams -- Badari, Puri, Dwarka and Rameswaram, the first three being Vaishnavate temples dedicated to the incarnations of Lord Maha Vishnu. It is one of the most highly venerated -- pilgrim centres of India for numerous reasons -- it possesses one of the twelve Jyotirlingas and is installed here by Sri Rama, the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and worshipped to purge of the sin of killing Ravana -- King of Srilanka, lying just 45 km away; it contains the Sethu Madhav shrine inside the precincts, testifying to the spirit of universality permeating in the thirtha kshetra; it is encircled by the holy waters of Ratnakara -- Indian Ocean and Mahodathi -- Bay of Bengal, blessing it with ever green verdure and gorgeous scenery in addition to enshrining sacred thirthas, famous for washing off sins; its visit alone, as tradition says, rounds off the arc of pilgrimage; it is from here the historic sethu -- bridge was constructed to link it up to Lanka for conveying the Vanarasena; it is this island temple that resembles Panchajanya -- Lord Vishnu’s conch and also Tamil letter ‘OM’; it is in this Mokshapuri, the Kailasa linga brought by Hanuman is installed beside the Sand Linga made by Mother Sita; it is here the Ganga water is used for the daily abhisheka of the presiding deities; it is in this temple precincts alone there are 22 famous thirthas, a mere bath in them ensures salvation; it is here a mere darshan of the Moolavar -- Ramalingeswaraswamy, one is relieved from the sin of
Brahmahatya; it is here Kalabhairava, bathing in the Sivathirtha was redeemed of the sin of cutting off the fifth head of Brahma; it is this shrine that rose up from the munificent donations of the Rajas of Ramnad and shot up into fame by the endowments made from time to time; it is to this temple the Ceylonese Prince Pararaja Sekhara made large donations and helped Udaian Sethupathi in the expansion and renovation activities; it is this temple that has the unique honour of having the most magnificent and longest corridors, on four sides each measuring nearly 400 feet in length 21 feet in height flanked by ornate pillars. This 1220 metre long pillared corridor of breathing beauty is the longest and stands as a fine symbol and the best specimen of Indian spiritual unity. Hence the belief — Rameswaram is to Hindus, what Mecca to Muslims and Jerusalem to Christians. Pilgrimage becomes complete and perfect with a bath in Agnithitham here, as the Ganges river bath there in Aryavartha. It is called the unchanging city due to no drastic changes brought upon by the impact of modern culture.

Antiquity

Though this sacred region has been abounding in famous thirthas and sacred spots right from the time for creation, it is only from the Treta yuga its fame started spreading far and near. In the dim past, it was a primeval forest evergreen with rich verdure. Abduction of Mother Sita by the ten-headed demon Ravana brought Ayodhyapati Rama to this end of sacred Ind. On reaching the Dhanushkodi, Rama propitiated the Sea-god with fast for three days to give in for the conveyance of Monkey Brigade, but to no effect. Finding him unyielding, Rama threatened to dry up the entire jalarasi with his powerful missiles. Appearing before Rama shivering, he pleaded that he was law bound, and it was against the laws of Nature to give up his inherent quality of impenetrability, but would certainly cooperate in the construction of bridge, if proposed. Argument being righteous and based on sound logic, Rama forgiving him, embarked upon the plan of building a 100 yojan — long bridge across the sea. Anon he called for
the services of Nala, the son of Viswakarma, who utilising the divine engineering skill made everything — wood or stone float, when thrown into sea and constructed the bridge to the wonderment of all worlds. It was during then this region gradually rose up in prominence; due its association with the august dignitaries and heaven-born celebrities like Rama, Lakshmana, Hanuma, Sugriva, Angada etc. It was then Rama made the first Siva linga with sand for offering prayers to Lord Maheswar; for, on landing here tired, he was about to drink water, when Lakshman reminded him of his regular practice of taking in anything after the darsan of Maheswar. At once, he made Sivalinga with sand and offered his usual prayers. Thus the land acquired for the first time a Sivalinga made with the divine hands of Sri Rama.

After Ravana Samhara; when Rama alighted here, he was advised by venerable sages headed by Agasthya to perform an expiatory rite for destroying Ravana the grandson of Sage Pulastya. This performance required a Sivalinga and that alone absolves one with the sin of Brahmahaty. So Rama bade Hanuman to fetch Jyotirlinga from Kailas from Lord Siva Himself. Hanuman reached, but could not obtain it as proposed. He then started penance atop the Himalayas to please Siva. Then down below at the extreme end, Rama was hastened to propitiate Lord Siva, at the right moment. Hanuman did not turn up. In order to perform that sacred rite in the auspicious moment, Agasthya advised Sita to prepare a Sivalinga out of sand. With due rites, and in the right time it was installed on the Jyestasukladasami, when the Moon was in Hasta and the Sun in Vrishabha. Just then Hanuman returned with Sivalinga obtaining from Lord Siva. Seeing the installation completed he was disappointed and went red in face. To appease him, Rama asked Hanuman to pluck out the one installed by him and install the linga brought from Kailas. Tried however much, he could not shake it; he courted a failure. Rama then consoled him by establishing his linga beside the one already installed and announced that all pujas must be offered first to Hanuman’s linga, to be called thereafter as Kasi.
craftsmanship in the sculptural art and regarded as second to none but to itself; it is to its educational institutions students from far off China, Japan, Siam, Tibet and Ceylon came for higher students; it is to this kshetra many royal families emptied their chests to beautifying with temples and Vidhyapithas; it is here fell a big chunk of Saligram of Tarakasura, when the spear hurled by Subrahmanya hit and split up into five parts, falling and forming later Pancharamas; it is this Punyakshetra equated with Varanasi in points of sanctity and granting boons by the presiding deities; it is this divyabhum that releases the visitors from the cycle of births and deaths -- freeing from Punarjanmas; it is this thirtha kshetra that assures Sivaloka for three days’ stay and worshipping Siva; it is to consecrate this land and worship Lord Siva, river Krishna changing its normal course from west to east, is flowing north to south.

Antiquity

Its glory rises from the fall of a big chunk of Amritalinga worn on the person of Tarakasura, when scattered into places by the potent spear of Subrahmanya, the Field-Marshal of Devasena. According to legend, the demon Taraka on obtaining potential boons from Lord Siva after ghora tapas, turned a veritable yama to mortals and immortals too. His unbridled and unending danava krityas made life unendurable to people. The Suras, along with devout and reverent devotees experienced narakabadha with their physical bodies still living, instead of undergoing it in yamaloka. Gods tortured and taunted day in and day out, braved war against Taraka, or course, under the instigation of Devendra, whose existence proved a living death. But to what effect? They were no match to that formidable demon. So were beaten black and blue and routed to the last. Fleeing from the war-field, they came to Dhanyakataka and lived for some time. On account of their living there for a short period, it was given the appropriate name of Amaravathi -- the place amaras. By fits and starts the battle went on; but everytime, Taraka was emerging victorious; so devas to stage a retreat to Danyakataka.
Unable to endure, all the devas met Lord Vishnu and narrated their woeful tale. Listening patiently, He regretted His inability, saying that his potent boons were invulnerable, and Lord Siva alone could offer solution and relieve them from misery. So they directed their steps to Lord Siva and repeated their woes, but Lord Siva frankly admitted His unwillingness and helplessness; for Taraka was a great Siva bhakta, and his act of bhakti was such a protective armour to him that any weapon by any, and at any time, proves futile. He would not harm Siva bhakta, nor was He capable of it. Does this not reveal, how potent the devotion is, and how the greatest potentate too becomes worst impotent by it. And the most highest too submits to it? Inspite of explaining His incompetence, the devas prayed for showing them the way.

Melted at their tear-stained faces, He deputed Shanmuga and assured that he would achieve victory. With redoubled vigour, they started the battle soon. Alas! Shanmuga too was courting failure now and then. For firm and final success, they again prayed for Siva's succour. He then directed Shanmuga, to break the Amruthalinga that brings victory instantly since, in as much as Taraka identified himself with Siva and was bearing on his body the Siva's emblem, encased in a box and fixed to neck chain, he would become powerless, if it is broken to pieces. It proved true -- Shanmuga with his dreadful spear shattered Siva linga into pieces. At once Taraka died. The shattered pieces fell at five places, and at the command of Lord Siva consecrated those places with installation of Sivalingas for regular worship by devas and people. All these places are called Pancharamas -- Ksheeraramam, Amararamam, Somaramam, Draksharamam and Bhimaramam, and in each, a temple was built and linga installed by celestial dignitaries. Brihaspathi was consulted for guidance. Under his direction, a white tall Sivalinga was installed and consecrated by Devendra and it was named Amareswaraswamy. Due ceremonies and agamic canons were strictly followed during installation, and regular prayer services too were introduced for the benefit of bhaktas of both heaven and earth.
The Temple Complex

The sacred shrine enshrining the white linga of Someswaraaswamy, installed in the august presence of Brihaspathi by Devendra lies on the bank of river Krishna. It has four strong high prakaras with four entrances and beautiful towers over them. It is built in the Dravidian architectural style and the sculptural adornments are pleasant to sight and enthrall the viewers with its loftiness and superb craftsmanship. The stone cutters' artistry is discernable in the delicate and ornate style of carvings on walls and ceilings. They are best specimens of art deserving careful study and it affords immense delight on understanding the intricacies of construction.

The Archamurti

The Mulavirat is a tall, appears like a white vertical cylinder with round top made of marble, and measures fifteen feet in height and two feet in breadth. Very few are existing of this height, and even the other linga of abnormal height found in Draksharamam is shorter to this, and moreover it is made of black stone. This white linga is quite unique. For offering abhishek, the priests have to ascend a flight of steps. The vimana and other mantaps are done in the Dravidian sytle. Another object deserving attention and veneration, here is Lord Siva's manifestations in five lingas. And all are installed in befitting mandaps in the campus only. They are -- Pranaveswara, Agasteswara, Kosaleswara, Someswara and Parthiveswara. Visitors worship them all with equal fervour and zeal.

Let us proceed then to Draksharamam to avail the darsan of the Lord in a two storeyed temple, abiding in equally a tall fourteen foot -- high granite Siva linga. Needless to repeat that the cause of His emergence in the other four also is one and the same. Repetition irks and hinders progress.
20 DRAKSHARAMAM – DRAKSHARAMAM

Uniqueness

What a sweet name! And how spontaneous is the flow of melody that meets the ears at its very mention; grand is its composition, and grander is the denotation, and grandest is the spectacle of compassion emanating from that unique fourteen-foot-high Swayamvyakta linga, installed in a two-tiered temple of Drakshramam town, drawing thousands of devotees throughout the year from all parts of our Punya Bharat, since the Krita yuga onwards. Can it be otherwise?

For, it is in this holy place that the All-merciful Mahadev is abiding to conferring bhoga on the devotees, while living and moksha on death, unlike other similar archamurtis renowned for granting emancipation sans bhoga; it is this kshetra entered in the records as the Northern tip demarcating the boundary of the once Trilinga desa, now called Andhra Pradesh; it is to this kshetra of peace and plenty, Vedavyasa came as directed by Mata Annapurneswari for settlement; it is in this Dakshina Kasi, the great sage Agasthya stayed for years, after humbling the ever-growing Vindhyas; and it is here Dhakshaprajapati lived, and Mother Parvathi burnt her self, when insulted by none but her own father.

The Tarakasura Episode

According to legends, this kshetra came to be known as Draksharamam on the death of Tarakasura at the hands of Subrahmanya, the redoubtable chief-Marshall of the celestial armies. The self same story detailed above gets repeated — that formidable demon Taraka due to wearing on his person a big size Amrita linga, as a mark of his achanchala bhakti — unshakable devotion to Lord Siva, being a Siva bhakta of high order. When he was brought down by Subrahmanya’s potent lance, hurled against his chest bearing the golden casket encasing the Sivalinga...
Viswanathalinga and then to the linga installed by him called Rameswaralinga. Approbation of the audience at once rent the air heralding, that both are equal and each must be worshipped for gaining merit. This sublime injunction is honoured even today -- Kasi Viswanathalinga first, Rameswaralinga next. How judicious was Rama! And what a compassion for his dependents!!

Another episode also illustrates his priceless mercy for the trusted, and it happened here. As the legends go, Vibhishana, is supposed to have expressed his fear to Rama that his kingdom would be vulnerable, if sethu were to be intact and transport continued along the bridge. To make his kingdom safe and life peaceful, Rama destroyed the sethu with one arrow shot. Thus disappeared the sethu built by Vanarasena. And this spot lights Rama's matchless vatsalya for his asritajana. Did he ever let down his dependents or associates? He is a gem among the incarnations, standing for the much-coveted triple ideals one word, one wife and one arrow.

The Temple Complex

The temple situated on the eastern coast of the island is a marvel of Dravidian art. The sanctum covers an area of 15 acres and the plinth occupies about 865 feet from east to west and 657 feet from north to south, and is surrounded by high walls on all four sides with tall imposing gopurams on three sides -- east, west and south and the one on the north is yet to be finished. It has three prakaras containing the most beautiful spell -- binding corridors, the like of which the world has yet to produce and likely may not, due to theism given a decent farewell by rationalism. There are several mandapams housing many minishrines with spacious halls in front for celebrating occasional pujas and are adorned with rare sculptures to attract both theists and connoisseurs alike.

As the visitors enter through the eastern gate after bath in agnithirtham -- part of Mahodati, they are greeted by Anjaneya enshrined in a beautiful minishrine. The statue
Painted in red is in the North Indian type in sculpture. As they move further, they are bewildered at the rows of gigantic statues of Sethupathi -- mounted on high pedestals forming the lower part of massive pillars of the mandapam. Next object that arrests their attention is the huge image of Nandi, measuring 12 feet in length, 9 feet in height, flanked by the beautiful figures of Viswanatha Naicker and Krishnana Naicker, the builders. To the left of Nandi there is a mandapam of modest size housing the Navagrahams. In front of the Nandi towards the entrance are situated the shrines for Ganapathi and Subrahmanya. Paying homage to them, they enter the Ramanathaswamy shrine to avail the darshan of the august linga installed by Sri Rama. As it is installed by Rama it is called Ramanathaswamy and it is one of the twelve Jyothirlingas. The serenity prevailing there bends the heads involuntarily. A sight of the Lord destroys a sin as grave a Brahmahatya. Offering soluful prayers, they next move to the Parvathavardhini shrine located to the right of sanctum sanctorum. The beautiful image of the Mother decorated with diamond jewellry and flower garlands lifts the soul. In front of the mandapam there are figures of Rama, Sit, Lakshman, Hanuman and Sugriva, the principal characters in the Epic and they beckon attention and veneration. To its north lies the Kasi Viswanatha shrine in which the linga brought by Hanuman from Kailas is installed. The Visalakshi Mandir lies adjacent to it. Daily prayers are offered to these deities first and then to Ramanathaswamy and Mother Parvathi Varidhini.

More than the mandapams and different images representing the adorable deities, there are 22 thirthas in different parts of the temple campus itself each with a characteristic taste of its own -- a unique feature not found in any temple anywhere in India. A bath in them is quite efficacious, showering peace and bliss to the bathers. Hence, every visitor invariably starts this ritual after taking bath in the Agnithirtham before entering the principal shrines. The medicinal properties of the thirthas cure skin diseases, according to belief. Among them, Madhav, Chakra, Amrita, Ganga, Saraswati, Parvathi, Lakshmi, Siva, Sarva, Kotithirthams are famous.

After prayers, visitors go to Dhanesh Kodi, Gandhamadana Parvatha and several thirthas.
INTRODUCTION TO PANCHARAMA KSHETRAS

Having traversed the whole of Bharat, to be precise visiting of the holiest kshetras enshrining the world renowned Panchabhutesthalas and the Dwadasa Jyotirlinga kshetras, scattered from Kedar to Rameswaram and Somanath to Varanasi, we feel our thirst is growing keener and keener for the darshan of the Lord abiding in several hundreds of sacred places, such as the Pancharamas, Amarnath, Brihadeeswaralayam to mention a few, don’t we? Hasn’t the craze on ascendancy? Quite natural! Inevitable! A befitting aftermath! Can the intense thirst be slaked with a single sip of Coca cola - the temporary tranquiliser? Would a colourful parasol shield anyone from thunderstorm? The real cause of the thirst must totally be quenched once for all. Don’t you feel so?

For that, further trip to the places of temples of hoary antiquity renowned for the eternal presence of Lord as promised, is the right course and workable solution. Indeed it calls forth strenuous efforts first and last, since those places are not congregated in one place, or stocked in one chest. If one is in the snow clad peaks of Himalayas, like Amarnath, the other is in Srilanka. And in between them, there are countless shrines where Lord Siva is adored with reverence due. Isn’t He permeating the whole mass of Punya dharitri, a fragment of cosmos. How then the oft-quoted dictum – ‘Sarvam Siva Mayam Jagat’ gained currency? Yet visitation is a MUST. But fortunately in some states the Sivaalayas are huddled as it were i.e. seperated only by short distances. Moreover, they are quite ancient and associated with His divyalilas. Among them Tamil Nadu, Andhra, Kerala deserve mention. Let us move first to Andhra Pradesh.

Not because it is adorning the first place in the list of states of India, but it is one of the Lord’s favourite arenas, where He played His sports on and on, at one spot or the other in the dim past. Moreover, the Siva temples lying at the ends of this land are demarcating it from other neighbouring states. As said rightly too, Telugu, the mother – tongue of Andhra has derived from the Trilinga desa i.e. the geographical region bounded by three holy lingas, such as Kaleswar in the north, Draksharamam in the east and Kalahasti in the south. Siva temples of known importance and great popularity are found in hundreds of places, as in Tamil Nadu, if comparison is needed. Some of them have far surpassed the old shrines, where the Lord is dwelling to keeping up His promise given. Among them the first preference goes to the Pancharamams, where He is abiding.
in the lingas installed and consecrated by the highest divinities, like Devendra, Chandra, Sri Rama, Kumaraswamy and Vyasa. The cause for His appearance and consequent beatitude prevailing their even today is quite awesome and unprecedented, says the sthalagna at every place and advises visiting them instantly, explaining the glory of his place in full. Besides those five kshetras of eternal importance, there are innumerable places soaked in Sivalila in this state, as it were. As each has a legend long and sublime; popularity immense and unchanging, frequency of visitation—unending and ever-craving; the use of superlatives to describe them serves no purpose. So, better visit them one after another. Personal experience exerts greater impact than reading or hearing. We will begin with Amaravathi, where Lord Siva is abiding in a unique fifteen-foot-high marble Siva linga the like of which is neither found anywhere in ancient world, where theism displayed its myriad splendour, nor in the modern machine age, when mammon worship is reigning supreme over the internal and external worlds of man, and bridging the gap between earth and heaven with rocket trips run by robots displaying his advanced ingenuity.

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AMARAVATHI – AMARARAMAM

Uniqueness

Its unique position, prosperity, prestige and glory emanate from several awe some factors that send thrills in the spines of the god-minded, when read, or heard. It is here Lord Siva is abiding in a white fifteen-foot-high linga, installed by no other than Devendra under the aegis of Devaguru Brihaspathi, reverentially called Amareswaraswamy, and is soulfully worshipped since the Vedic age; it is this holy nagar deemed one of the eighteen Saktripthas, and the Devi worshipped as Bala Chamundika; it is here the first ancient Andhra University was established; it is from this domineering capital city Sathavahanas ruled; it is here lived the master architects and designers, surpassing even Maya or Viswakarma in artistry of plastic arts, particularly sculpture that brought immortal fame to the state; it is this holy place passed for Triputi due to the presence of the three covetable factors - daivam, thirtham, kshetram; it is here lies the world renowned Buddha Stupas displaying the superb
beautiful Vimana adorned with a shining kalasa atop the garbha griha in the Nagar style lends charm to the environs and heightens the sanctity of the shrine. With very many niches adorned with parivaradevatas vast courtyards, and sculptural adornments, this temple attained fame and is attracting ardent devotees throughout the year. The archamurti is moderately a big Sivalinga known as Ramalingeswaraswamy since it was installed by Sri Rama but popularly called Ksheerarameswaraswamy. It is made of marble and so crystal white unlike the black granite lingas found in almost all the Sivaalayas. The belief current in this region is that this is a self-manifested linga Swayambhu and bears on its back three stipes. A speciality. It is adorned with Jatamakuta also. With many such rarities, this temple has turned out a sure refuge for securing mental solace, physical health and spiritual wealth. The Lord too is bestowing boons liberally. Hence unbounded fame. The annual Mahasivaratri festival celebrated on the Maghabahula chaturthi attracts huge crowds of Siva bhaktas. Saivagama worship is offered as done in all Pancharamams.

Having seen this, we have to go to Samalkota to avail the darsan of Kumareswaraswamy.

22 SAMALKOTA - KUMARARAMAM

This holy kshetra is variously called, like Bhimaramakshetra, and Kumararama kshetra. Both have legends and are justified. It is one of the Pancharamas that brought undying fame to our Bharat and Andhra Pradesh in particular. Its plus points are many and the Sivalilas enacted here are numerous, besides the seat of Amrit linga. As this came under the rule of famous Chalukya kings, it was called Chalukya Bhimavaram and hence the name Bhimaramakshetra. This sacred archamurti is popularly called Samalkota Bhimeswara and the royal patronage it received is quite enormous and it peeps at the visitors and elevates them.

The unique feature that greets the devotees here is the unusual height of the Sivalinga that raises from
the ground floor and goes up to the third floor. So all kinds of prayer services are performed on the third floor. In this aspect it resembles three-storied temple of Mahakala at Ujjain. The sculptural wealth of this shrine, having been munificently endowed by the Chalukya rulers is so impressive and quite spectacular that immensity in size and mastery in craftsmanship permeates the whole complex. The five-foot-high Nandi, the divine vehicle of Lord Siva is quite imposing and lures the visitors invariably. And another sculptural marvel is the Balatripurasundari shrine which contains a grand, mantap, called Vuyyala mantap. A black granite swing of supreme craftsmanship is housed here. It is fifteen feet above the floor and swings forward and backwards when rocked. Its architectural skill deserves high appreciation. This lies next to Kalyanamandapam. Both are worth-seeing. One more sculptural grandeur that draws the attention of the devotees is the artistry displayed in making of huge Dwarapalakas called Chanda Prachandas, standing at the entrance to garbha griha. This august Sivalinga was installed by Kumaraswamy in the presence of Gods and Maharshis. Hence the name Kumararamam.

Skanda Purana eulogises this kshetra elaborately and includes the names of the celebrated dignitaries such as Vyasa Maharshhi, who visited and adored the Lord with unbounded devotional fervour. In the campus of this aalaya there is a Pushkarini -- holy tank and it is customary that all the bhaktas take bath in it before worshipping the Lord. It is called Bhimakundam. Besides the Saivite gods, like Vinayaka, Kumaraswamy, Parvathi, it houses the grand images of Saptamatrikas and Navagrahas in mandapams befitting their position and reputation.

The glory of this Kumararama is extensively portrayed in Siva and Skandapuranas. The Mahasivaratri annual festival is celebrated on a grand scale for four days, when devotees come from far and near in lakhs.

It is in Samalkot town, in the West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

Our last halt is at Bhimavaram, where Someswaraswamy linga greets us to shower blessings to our satisfaction.
BHI MAVARAM – SOMARAMAM

This sacred shrine dedicated to Maheswara is situated in Gunupudi, an integral part lying to the east of Bhimavaram, the district head quarters town of the same name in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. It is one of the Pancharamams sanctified by the falling of one of the five broken chips of Amritalinga worn by Tarakasura. So the background is same as the other four kshetras. The archamurti Sivalinga is fairly a big one measuring about five feet in height. The temple faces east and has a high charming tower over the Mahadwar. The temple is two storeyed and enshrines Someswaralinga in the ground floor and the image of Mother Parvathi in the first floor in the name of Annapura. This Sivalinga was installed by the Moon-god--Soma and hence the temple is called Someswaraswamy Aalayam and its puranic name is Somaramam. The crystal linga reflects the waning and waxing of Moon - i.e. appearing bright for fifteen days like the Moon and dim in the next fortnight. On full moon days it appears white and on new moon days brown and black.

This was endowed liberally by Bhima, one of the enlightened rulers of the Chalukya dynasty. Later during the Virasaiva rulers of Vundi dynasty, the temple became popular when many additions were made and lured bhaktas in unending streams. The same town houses two more Sivaalayas with tall Sivalingas built and patronised by Chalukyas in the tenth century and they are called Someswaraalayam and Bhimeswaraalayam. Their origin is recent when compared with one housing of the big Sivalinga installed by Soma. In addition, the temple tank called Somagundam or Chandrapushkarini lies to the eastern side of the prakara. There are grand shrines here in the temple complex, for Janardhanaswamy, Kumaaraswamy, Anjaneyaswamy, receiving regular worship. So this deserves to be called a Haribara kshetra housing Saivate and Vaishnavate gods as well in one campus.

With this the pancharamakshetra darasan comes to an end and we have to visit Amarnath in the high Himalayas.
INTRODUCTION TO SHRINES SUPERB OF LORD SIVA

With the visitation of the twelve exalted Saiva kshetras enshrining the Jyotirlingas, Panchabhutasthalas embodying the five of the Sivashtamurti pithas and Pancharamas, housing the Amritalinga pieces of Tarakasura, consecrated by the highest divinities, our Saiva kshetra darsan yatra could not reach the point of consummation, nor could one feel satisfied in seeing Lord Siva’s sports in their entirety. There are thousands of Sivaalayas existing since time immemorial, as the Saivism was the most potent extant religion even before the time of Mohenjodaro civilisation. And it raised its head to boasting of its exemplary spiritual life that sent religious leaders to far-off eastern and western countries to establish the glory of Hinduism. Each state, each district and each mandal has one or two of great Sivaalayas of great antiquity and the Sthalapuranas proudly proclaim that in their places Lord Siva has been dwelling and blessing them from the dawn of spiritual life. From Amarnath to Trincomalle in Sri Lanka and Prabhass pattana to Bali in Java there are very many visit-worthy Saivite shrines imbued with mystism of unique type in one aspect or other. And the miracles occurred in some places far surpass the divinity of the aforesaid and elaborately described kshetras. A visit is not only rewarding but it is considered to be an indispensable necessity, if one desires to make his life sublime and praise worthy. True, all the Saivite temples cannot be covered in one’s life time, but visiting of the most ancient ones throbbing with Sivalilas can be materialised, if one yearns sincerely, devoutly, and ecstatically too.

To avoid the boredom of repetition and lessen the weight of the book too, I have given only a few lines in certain cases and hinted names in some others. And for the most important ones, elaborate accounts are given extracting from my own books - The Abodes of Gods Series, concerning the Archamurthis alone. Ardent devotees and labour – loving asthikas can glean greater details and exhaustive accounts, if they read those write-ups on the temples referred here. Forget not the adage – Labour is holy. It renumerates the involved out of proportion too. The following pages strive to envisage the myriad glory of Siva abiding in several places. As there are numerous, elaborate accounts are not possible, but their salient features are given and they amply serve the purpose. Let us begin our yatra with Amarnath, lying in the high Himalayas.
it at once broke into five pieces and fell at five different and distant places, and they became auspicious kshetras. And they were called the Pancharamas. Later, each was dedicated to Lord Siva under different names with installation of archamurtis by high divinities, like Devendra making Amareaswara Vigraha Pratishta in Amareaswaraswmay Aalayam in Amaramam, now goes by the name of Amaravathi; Someswara Vigraha by the Moon-god Chandra in Someswaraalayam in Somaramam, now called Gunupudi; an integral part of Bhimavaram town; Ramalingeswara Vigraha by Sri Rama in Ramalingeswaralayam in Ksheeraramam, now called Palakollu; Kumarabhimeswara Vigraha by Kumaraswamy in Kumarabhimeeswaralayam in Kumararamam, now called Samalkota; and the last being Draksharama, where the Swayambhu Linga was installed by Vyasa in Bhimeswaraalayam now called Draksharamam. These five kshetras were deemed highly holy, and so celestials chose them for habitation. Dhaksha made Daksharamam as his abode and hence called Daksharamam; and perhaps an account of the bumper crops of grapes grown on this soil, it was fittingly called Draksharamam later. This has many legends worth knowing and they exemplify the glory of this place. The self immolation of Sati, the Lords spouse occurred here. Read AGS NO. 3 for full account.

Vedavyasas Episode

Once Vedavyasa had a problem. Though not of serious type, it caused annoyance a bit more, and he lost mental poise. In his daily morning round for biksha on that unfortunate day, he could not get a fistful from any house. Even his soliciting humbly from the donors too he met with failure. This would certainly hinder his divine activities of teaching and writing. When frustration reached the climax, he was on the verge of cursing the citizens. Just then an old woman appeared before and fed him sumptuously. His disciples too enjoyed an unusual treat. Before leaving, when he looked up to thank her, but he found her to be Mata Annapurneswari. Flashing affectionate
smiles, the mother said, "Dear Vyas, you failed miserably in the test thrust upon you by my Lord Siva. He is much incensed at the loss of your mental equilibrium. He deemed you unfit to live in this Mokshapuri, where the Lord is to be won over by austerities. This is not the place for easeful living, yogis who look upon adversity and prosperity with equanimity alone stay here and attain emancipation. So it is better for you to leave this place at once, lest my licensed Lord would torture you with further tests. Better go to Draksharama -- the Bhogapuri where Bhimeeswar is lifting devotees without ordeals. Mere faith in Him fetches bhoga during the earthly sojourn, and blissful emancipation after death". Convinced with the advice, and regretting his folly, he at once left Kasi and reached Draksharamam with his disciples, numbering 300. And started adorning the Lord with due devotion. The Lord too showered on him all the needed for continuance of his literary career and teaching profession uninterrupted, and what is more with redoubled vigour. He enjoyed the company of Agasthya, who came here earlier on a greater mission.

The Temple

This august sanctum is built in the centre of town and has three massive prakaras with entrances on four sides. Normally devotees enter through the southern gate with a high pagoda over it. The court yard here is very vast and houses many minishrines. And the temple office too. It is in the second prakara, the devotees see cluster of mantapas adorned with several adorable deities, like Dunduganapathi, Virupaksha, Nataraja, Saptamatrikus, Mahishasura Mardini, Anjaneya, Subrahmany, Chaturmukha Brahma, Vatukabhairava, Ashtadikpalakas, Navagrahas, Chandiswar, Suryeswar etc. The architecture of this temple dates back to 14th century, when the ruling kings, particularly Anavema Reddy from Reddy dynasty beautified it with several additions, renovations and the like. Inscriptions and epigraphical details narrate the successive
line of donors, who strove to raise the glory of this shrine by munificent donations and endowments till it was taken over by the State Government.

Realising its former glory and its present decadence, the Department of Archaeology has undertaken it to renovate it. So it is now a protected monument slowly emerging to reach its former splendour, yet the progress is slow to speak the truth.

Archamurthi

It is 14 feet high. And one has to ascend the stairs to reach the second storey, where the Bhimeswar is seen in all His splendour and lustre; it is spatika linga. All prayer services are offered here only. It is an elevating experience to see such a huge, high linga coming from below and worshipped in the second tier. The image of Manikyamba is installed to the North of Sivalinga in a separate shrine. The utsavamurthis of several deities are extremely grand, and their visual appeal detains the viewers long. There are huge halls in the inner courtyard to accommodate thousands of devotees congregating on special festivals, celebrated periodically with unusual fervour. Among them, Bhishma Ekadasi, Karthika Jwalatoranam, Mahasivaratri deserve mention and they have great pull. During the Bhishma Ekadasi, Ratotsava -- Car festival is celebrated on the 4th day when thousands visit and overflow courtyards in and out of the prakaras. The temple Pushkarini which is lying outside the first prakara, has a story to tell and a sanctity that draws all for a bath; it confers the same merit as that of Godavari when bathed. Legend says that when the Saptarishis -- Atri, Kasyap, Goutama, Jamadagni, Vasista, Bharadwaja and Viswamitra visited the temple, they found water scarcity. So created a Pushkarini, and by their atmasakti brought the Godavari water through antarvahini and filled this Pushkarini. So it acquired the name of 'Saptasagaram'.

Our next visit is to palakollu, the modern name for ksheeraramam
PALAKOLLU - KSHEERARAMAM

This is one of the Pancharamams dedicated to Lord Siva. The temple is fairly a big one with a bigger legend and the biggest community of aaradhakas even earlier than Tarakasura vadha. Of course, here fell one of the five pieces of the big size linga worn on Tarakasura’s chest. Prior to this auspicious occurrence also, it attained fame as Dhugdopavanapuram with a long legend. This famous temple is situated in Palakollu near Narasapuram in the West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

Antiquity

According to legend, Vupamanyu, the son of venerable Kausika Maharshi, one of the Saptamaharshis doing Saivaaradhana here once, solicited Maheswar for milk to making Kaheerabhisheka to Lord; for, milk was scarcely available in this region. Realising the request reasonable, Lord Siva dug a tank with His potent Trident here and diverted milk from Ksheerasagaga. It not only fulfilled Vupamanyu’s wish, but also enabled people to get plentiful milk from that tank overflowing with it perennially. So it got the name of Palakota which in course of time became Palakollu. On account of the abundant growth of milk trees here, this primeval forest area was called Dhugdapanam and also Vupamanyakpuram due to dwelling of Vupamanyu here, and worshipping Siva according to legend. Later it was fortunate enough to be blessed with one of the five pieces of Sivalinga of Tarakasura, and it was called Ksheeraramam. The sacred Sivalinga receiving worship now was installed by Sri Rama in the Tretayuga. Hence doubly holy and greater attraction too. Srinatha’s Bhimeswapurana embodies and elaborate account of this kshetra and the sports of Siva.

Let us now enter and feast our eyes with the archamurti of great antiquity. This temple facing East has a tall hundred and twenty foot high tower and is said to have been built towards end of eighteenth century. The
SIVA TEMPLES IN KASHMIR

AMARNATH
(The waxing andwaning Sivalinga of Amarnath)

Uniqueness

The waxing and waning snow-linga of Amarnath is wonder of wonders of our Punya Bharat, luring several thousands of pilgrims every year, in the months of Sravana and Bhadrapada equivalent to August, September in English calendar. This nature-made linga is imbued with such mystery and sanctity that it is exercising an irresistible fascination over ardent Saivates in particular and theists in general, since time immemorial. According to tradition, it is here Maheswar, the all-benevolent Lord distributed amrit -- nectar to mukkoti devathas to making them immortal and immune against the danavakrityas of asuras. And they in grateful devotion named Him Amarnath. It is here, on one full moon night, Lord Maheswar explained to Harvathi the secrets of creation together with attainment of Moksha. And it is this sacred spot that witnessed the metamorphosis of Uma Maheswar into doves, when His narration of that secret was over-heard by His birthyas. It is this place that is giving darsan of Uma Maheswar and Tanapathi in the form of ice-lingas. It is this holy kshetra, where Muslims enjoy more or less equal status with Brahmins in sharing the offerings and also distributing phrasadam. It is to this holy shrine H.H. Sankaracharya of Sarada Peeth of Kashmir leads a procession on foot every year in the month of Shravana from Srinagar. It is this kshetra that traces the origin of several monuments made by philanthropic rulers of Kashmir. And it is this thirtha kshetra that tests the endurance of pilgrims during the holy trek of 48 km taking almost one full week. It is to this yatra alone that the State Government is evincing utmost interest in arranging every amenity, like food, accommodation, transport, medical, post and telegraph, police
etc., to the pilgrims from the starting point to the sannidhi and back to Pahalgam, the scenic tourist resort and the place from where normally the journey on foot begins by tourists and pilgrims. And finally it is this kshetra that gives darshan of the Adi-dampatis in the form of pigeons on wing even today -- a standing reality of the divinity enshrined in linga to the believers of every ‘ism’ in the theistic world.

Antiquity

In the beginning, according to tradition, Kashmir valley was a lake called Sati-saras, named after Parvathi, the consort of Lord Maheswar. This was the habitat of dreadful demons, the sworn enemies of humans and gods. Their existence was a perennial threat to people living nearby, as they were cannibals and delighted at the suffering of human beings. Pitying their misery, Kasyapa, the great humanist sage destroyed the entire race along with their king Jalodbhava. Later, he converted this place of Himavan, the father of Parvathi into land and named it Kashmir Mandal. In course of time, many shrines of great spiritual significance were built by kings of Kashmir both for Siva and Vishnu. As their number increased rapidly, they covered almost all the space, and many thirthas were discovered to the extent that there was not an inch of space that was not dedicated either to Vishnu or Siva. Amarnath, the sacred thirtha kshetra dedicated to Lord Maheswar tops the list and lies at a distance of about 100 km to the north-east of Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. And it is made popular by the theist kings of Kashmir by their humanitarian ministrations. Kalhana’s master–piece Raja-tarangani, the veritable treasure house of the history of Kashmir kings and their rule deals with the origin of Amarnath in detail, and throws light on the yatra to that Himalayan abode of Lord Maheswar.

The story begins in the dim past with Gonanda I on the throne of Kashmir, a contemporary of Jarasandha, the close associate of Kamsa of Mathura. As we move with the chronicle, we learn that Damodara, son of Gonanda I was killed by Yadavas. His wife Yasomoti, the then
pregnant queen was preferred by Sri Krishna, the Yaduvulaabhushan to rule the kingdom till here progeny came to age, since the land of Kashmir is itself Parvathi incarnate. And the ruler of that country is the amsa or particle of Siva, and so Krishna was against annexing it. Many historical personages succeeded and monumental constructions were left behind as relics. Among them the Seshanag lake occupies a pre-eminent place. The famous Seshanag lake lying between Chandanvadi and Wavjan was constructed by Susravasa Naga and the glory of this Naga is elaborately described in the Rajatarangani of Kalhana. This ruler of eminence had two beautiful daughters named Iravathi and Chandralekha. Due to evil machinations of a bogus Sadhu, he encountered many problems. Knowing the helplessness of the noble king, a brahmin by name Visakha came to his rescue and relieved him of his anxieties by his soul power. Susravasa gave his handsome daughter Chandralekha to Visakha in marriage out of gratitude. 

The beautiful couple lived an exemplary happy life in the capital of Kinneragrama ruled by King Nara, an infamous king who brought shame to his illustrious father, King Vibhishhrana II, by his laxity in morals and frivolous behaviour. Due to misfortune, one day a horse entered the compound of Chandralekha and ate away her grains spread out in sunlight. In her attempt to drive away the stray horse, she patted on its back, and it left a golden imprint of her hand on horse's back. The oddity of the incident soon spread throughout the capital. Learning it, King Nara set his net and used all means to secure her for satisfying his carnality. He descended even to the nefarious level of asking her husband to part with her for quenching his kamadaha, but failed. In his hopeless passion for her, he decided to besiege the house, but the couple had escaped before his atrocious plan was embarked upon. Chandralekha with her husband Vishaka sought refuge in Susravasa Naga, her father. Flying into rage, he burnt the entire city of Nara and finally killed him. When remorse held him in tight grip, he started building lakes and lying roads connecting shrines with towns for the
comforts of people, in expiation of sin committed. Among
the many, Seshanaga lake on the way to Amarnath and
Jamatri is still standing in proof of that act, proclaiming
his glory in its rise and fall.

THE CAVE AND THE SNOW LINGA

On the auspicious Sravana Purnima day, devotees
after purging of their impurities sticking to body, mind
and soul in the river Amaravathi also called Amaraganga
enter the cave to greet their eyes with the holy snow
image of Siva linga. This sacred cave is about 150 feet
high and 90 feet broad. The walls are moist and appear
to have been made of gypsum. The ceiling is leaky except
for a small area. There are two holes in the northern
wall from which snow white water drops trickle down and
form into ice as soon as they fall. Of the two, one hole
is slightly bigger and right below it is the huge Sivalinga
measuring about two yards in height formed by the snow
water dripping from the roof. To the right of this Linga,
there is another formation of Snow linga and it is called
the image of Parvathi, and to its left there is yet one
more little linga for Ganesh formed likewise. The devout
pilgrims offer obeisance to all the three snow images with
all due fervour. Several types of prayer services and rituals
are performed with the aid of priests.

Though the cave faces south and there is no chance
of Sun’s rays falling directly on the snow image, the images
waxe and wane along with the waxing and waning of
moon. Is it not a marvel to be seen and admired at?
Does it not testify to the truth of Lord’s inscrutability?
Would science offer any palpable solution? Can labs with
round the clock investigation disprove the divinity of the
land behind this mysterious phenomenon? Will this not
throw challenge to the ingenuity to untie the knot? Nothing
but soulful prostration pleases the devout pilgrim at the
very sight of this mystic Sivalinga, and uttering Harhar
Mahadev in token of his ecstatic joy at the fortune of standing in front of that which waxes and wanes with moon regardless of his allegiance to secular or scientific faith.

This rare phenomenon has been highly applauded by even other religions and they recorded it with inexplicable joy. The famous An-i-Akbari of Abul Fazl embodies this rare phenomenon with great gusto. It says in Vol.II Page 360—“Amarnath is considered a shrine of great sanctity. When the new moon rises, from her throne of rays, a bubble as it were of ice formed in the cave which daily increases little by little for fifteen days till it is somewhat higher than two yards, of the measure of yard determined by his majesty; with the waning of moon the image likewise begins to decrease, till no trace of it remains when the moon disappears”. Needless to prolong that every national who visits it expresses his infinite joy is such terms, that bears testimony to his acceptance of the divinity presiding in the cave. There is on the left, a small cave inside Amarnath, from which a white substance resembling chalk is dug out and given to the visitors as Vibhuti of Amarnath. And this prasadam is distributed by Mohammedans of Batukut village, whose share in making the journey enjoyable during halts at several places and service at every step are beyond description. Distribution of prasadam by Muslims in a Hindu shrine is very odd, and can be deemed a rarity of rarities. It only mirrors Lord Maheswar’s giving prominence to devotion than to man made distinctions. It is going on! This practice is rooted in a strange myth. Listen!

Origin of the snow linga

Once, as the story goes, a Muslim shepherd by name Buta Malik was given a sack of coal by a sadhu out of love for his pious living. When opened it in the house that night he found the coal pieces be gold. Overjoyed Muslim went to the spot to thank him for the fortune given. But he found a cave, when went inside, and found the snow linga. He started worshipping it with great fervour, thinking that Siva alone conferred that fervour. And others followed him for bliss and fortune. In
course of time it became a place of pilgrimage. As it was discovered and popularised by him, his descendants are given a percentage of donations even today. The pilgrims carry with them the white substance deposited on the bank of Amaraganga, for they believe that by smearing it on their bodies, it protects them from severe cold and other skin diseases. They name it Amara Vibhuti. During their stay lasting for hours, they observe white pigeons flying about and they instantly bow to them considering them as Siva and Parvathi in the form of birds.

After bath, darshan and prayer to the Snow-image of Maheswar in this ageless Amarnath cave, they make return journey with souls filled with Maheswar’s image; minds; exultant at the fulfilment of long standing desire of visiting a shrine atop the Himalayas; eyes, feasted with an unusual auspicious sight; ears, ringing with the sounds of Harhar Mahadev; hearts, overflowing with devotional emotions; hands full of Amara Vibhuti and legs moving swiftly to reach home for distributing the prasadam to kith and kin, who eagerly await the happy return. Ah What a devotion ! How great is the faith !

25 Srinagar – Sankaracharya Siva Mandir

This ancient Siva temple built atop a hillock surrounded by greenery, affords a thrilling experience throughout the ascent on the flight of stairs, broad and long. The hallowed mandir built in a circular fashion looks grand. The tall, big marble Siva linga consecrated by Adi Sankara lifts the soul beyond description. During the circumambulation ritual itself, one experiences inexplicable joy, and on completion of the floral offerings standing infront of it, he feels reaching Kailas, the seat of Siva. The spacious lawns infront and small buildings built for the convenience of yatris amidst colourful plants detain the visitors and relieve the fatigue of ascent by their intrinsic charms. It can be reached by bus from the city.

There are some more Sivaalayas in the city like Kameswar Sivalinga etc., that are visit – worthy.
Siva Temples in Jammu Tawi

26 MATA VAISHNODEVI - SIVA TEMPLE

The Mata Vaishnodevi temple complex enshrines near its cave a beautiful Sivalinga of supreme significance. It lies just opposite the main mandir. The adorers of Mata are doubly fortunate to avail the golden opportunity of worshipping Lord Siva here. Soon after the completion of the ritualistic worship to Mata, they direct their steps to the Siva sannidhi. Its antiquity and proper maintenance are its plus points for visitation and adoration. The linga though only of modest size, its floral decoration and the spick and span of the surroundings involuntarily raises the hands of bhaktas, when they let out instantly Harhar Mahadev sounds reverberating the whole area.

It is accessible upto Katna by bus from Jammu Tawi Railway Station, and the rest of 14 Km distance has to be trekked by one and all.

27 JAMMU & TAWI - SIVA MANDIR

The state Jammu and Tawi has the proud privilege of having one of the biggest Hindu temples of the Akanda Bharat Khand. The Raghunathji Mandir, as said by the sthalagnaś justly occupies the highest place in the temple map of India. It is a veritable Harihara kshetra and from among the evidence available staring into the visitor's eyes, it is extremely difficult to call it a Vaishnavate shrine or Saivat temple. It goes by the sacrosanct name of Raghunathji temple, but by the evidence of the number of Sivalingas installed and adored, it deserves to be named as Siva mandir only. No where in India such infinite number of Sivalingas are housed in one place. Neither the ancient, nor the modern Siva mandir built anywhere on the globe claims that most honoured number of Sivalingas receiving worship. It is said that there are a thousand crore -- Sahasrakoti Sivalingas installed in ten huge halls
in an odd way. The very number staggers one’s imagination and benumbs the senses. By and large, everyone unconditionally pays homage to the builders of this famous Raghunathji mandir, the crest jewel of the state, or to be precise the dazzling diamond in the diadem adorning the Bharatamata.

The Raghunathji idols are extremely beautiful and their embellishments are quite pleasing and wring veneration at a mere sight.

In addition to the Sahasrakoti small lingas installed in huge halls, the temple enshrines a big size crystal linga about three feet in height, in one of the shrines in the campus. And eleven pairs of big size lingas in another. This Saivite treasure is incalculably infinite and there is no wonder, if the visitors utter that it surpasses the famous Jyotirlinga kshetras, where Lord Siva’s spirit permeating seems rising higher than the highest Everest to rain His Omnicoexistence on His adorers living all over the universe in addition to those visiting them. Siva’s infinitude can be seen here in the form of lingas with mortal eyes.

It is in the capital of the state of the same name, accessible by all means of transport.

FAMOUS SIVA MANDIRS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

KULLU VALLEY - BIJLI MAHADEV MANDIR

This sacred Himalayan region besides being an open air stadium for displaying the acts of physical valour like trekking, skiing and rock climbing, houses many marvellous temples whose spiritual power is seen vying with the forces of Nature. The unbounded and infinite soul power is surpassing the powers of Nature. The Bijli Mahadev mandir lying 11 Km off the town Kullu valley is a standing example of man’s inexhaustible consistent persistence to
overcome the power of Nature and his unshakable faith in God.

This remarkable hill temple, located on a high projecting cliff, and built of large blocks of stone, houses a Sivalinga and the important Saivate gods. And is visited by a regular streams of devotees throughout the year. Here is its plus point. This has a 60-foot-high staff fixed opposite the Sivalinga deserving reverence mention first; for it is exceeding the unexcelled wonders of the world. It is believed that this staff attracts lightning very often, rather periodically. It is natural; for it is made of iron. This natural phenomenon has been interpreted in an exotic orthodox way, and people considered it as a sign of God’s blessing. The lightning along with thunder bolt naturally causes damage to the temple and shatters the Sivalinga to pieces. But the devotees deeming it a sign of auspiciousness, labouring hard put together the shattered pieces. And moreover, cover it with butter and tattoo paste only to receive another lightning flash and its disastrous effects. Again they make.... repetition of this miracle has been going on since ages. What a Peity! Inscrutable are the sports of God and equally mysteriously mystic is the man’s faith in Him. Which out weighs what, is known to that Lord alone.

It lies in the Kullu Valley of Himachal Pradesh, commanding transport facilities from Kullu town.

29) PALAMPUR- BAIJNATH MANDIR

The inexplicable magic of the Himalayan mountains, besides luring the fun-loving adventurous youth for skiing and trekking as said before also attracts the theists for worship at several famous temples it abounds, like Jwalaji, Jagatkush Chaurasi and Bajnath. This Bajnath temple enshrines big images of Siva and Parvathi along with a Sivalinga. The sanctum is an ancient one with many legends. The stories of its bygone past are quite sanctifying and hence attraction for all classes of people who throng throughout the year.

It lies between Jwalamukhi and Bajaura temple near Palampur, a big town commanding all travel facilities.
BAJAURO - BASHESWAR MAHADEV TEMPLE

Set amidst the magnificent grandeur of the Himalayan mountain range with vast expanse of dazzling snow, and giving birth to rushing torrents and luxuriant forests, this Kullu Valley treasures up several temples for all the gods of Hindu Pantheon, like, Raghunath temple, Hadimba Devi temple, Bijli Mahadev temple etc. Though their traditions and customs appear a little bit bizzare, the devotion that springs up from this simple, yet devout folk merit high praise and great veneration.

Among the temples, deserving visitation, Basheswar Mahadev temple is one and its architectural beauty is a standing specimen of the Nagara type. Though its proportions are modest, the elegance exuding from the exterior sculptural ornamentation is commendable and highly enchanting.

This sacred Siva Mandir houses besides Sivalinga other Saivate gods. The rituals and traditions are redolent of North Indian type, but they are not contradictory to the Saivagamas. This temple though situated very near the Bijli Mahadev temple, its attraction is great. Periodical festivals draw huge crowds.

It is in Bajaura 15 km off Kullu town having transport facilities.

NAGGAR - GAURISHANKAR SHRINE

This town enjoyed the reputation of the Capital of Kullu for nearly 1400 years. Its enchanting location encircled by the panoramic view of the hills as back drop invites and detains both tourists and devotees alike. Its castle lying amidst splendid views of colourful nature, though now houses a hotel, still contains the regality of high order. Around this castle lie many magnificent temples built for all and among them Gaurishankar temple deserves mention.
It is built of grey stone, yet its architectural beauty is praise-worthy.

Here there are temples for other gods and goddesses like Tripurasundari etc., but the glory of Gowri Shankar stands quite apart. On account of the status, the town Naggar enjoyed as capital, foreigners visit in large numbers and offer worship devoutly. For the natives too, its pull is great. The images installed are best specimens of sculpture. They draw devotees regularly and on the periodical festival days, thousands congregate.

It is 5 km off Katrain on the river Beas river.

FAMOUS SIVA MANDIRS IN HARYANA

32 KURUKSHETRA – STHANESWAR TANK MANDIR

It is an ancient shrine that established a great name and received veneration from the incarnated celestials and their associates. The tank on which it is built is equally famous and goes by the name of Sthaneswar tank.

The temple is situated in front of Sthaneswar Siva Tank. According to tradition, it is here that the Pandavas worshipped Maheswar before going to war and got victory with His blessings. Its waters are said to have magical powers of curing leprosy. Hence the thronging of the victims of that dreadful disease in large numbers throughout the year. More so, it is one of the oldest mandirs bearing the vestiges of ancient sculptural marvels. Due to its association with Pandavas and their victory after adoration it enkindles veneration for visitation.

It lies in the town of Kurukshetra commanding rail and bus facilities.
PAONTA - PATLIEN JYOTIRLINGA MANDIR

The city of Paonta Saheb etched its glorious name on the pages of history as a holy seat of Gurudwara. It is here Guru Govind Singh wrote the major portion of the Dassam Granth. This fast-growing city proudly proclaims of having an ancient Siva temple and more so claiming its Sivalinga as a Joytirlinga. The legend narrates that it was a powerful one worshipped by Patanjali, one of the disciples of Vyasa Maharshi. Many celebrated kings and sages adored and accomplished their desires with the Lord's grace.

Another Siva temple lying 8 km of Paonta also lures Saivates throughout the year.

It lies 45 km of Dehradun and accessible by bus from Nahanaho.

FAMOUS SIVA SHRINES IN RAJASTHAN

PUSHKAR - ATMESWAR MAHADEV MANDIR

Pushkar, the only famous earthly abode extant of Brahma in full splendour and the holiest spot for Brahmopasana is munificently accommodating other gods like Siva, Varaha, Badarinarayana etc. in separate individual, beautiful and imposing temples. Though these shrines tasted the wrath of Muslim invaders, who razed them to ground ruthlessly several times, renovation programme has enabled the devotees to avail the darsan of the most worshipful deities in new mandirs.

The Atmeswar mandir lying very near to the Brahma shrine has a beautiful Sivalinga adored by lakhs of devotees throughout the year. This mandir was renovated by Goomanti Rao in 1809 A.D. It is well maintained and
regular Shivaaradhan is carried on to the linga with unparalleled devotion.

It lies in Pushkar, lying at 15 km to Ajmir, the premier princely capital enjoying all facilities.

MOUNT ABU - ACHALESWARA MAHADEV TEMPLE

The four Rajput clans that ruled a great part of the Aryavartha for centuries, left behind a rare heritage in the form of immortal monuments for the theist world to admire and emulate. Their contribution to religion, and particularly building of temples is beyond the range of words and thought. Among the innumerable temples built, Khajuraho forms the crest jewel, besides this, the whole state of Rajasthan is studded to its bounds with marvellous temples. Mount Abu alone treasures up many ancient Siva temples, renovated, or built afresh by them. Among them, Koteeswaraalayam and Achaleswara Mahadev temple top the list.

The Achaleswara Mahadev temple said to have been built by Maharshi Vasishtha in the bygone aeons, and renovated by theist kings from time to time deserves mention for ardent worship. This sacred linga was installed by him in his ashram then for his personal worship, and later, a temple came up for public worship. This prestigious shrine is in the vicinity of the famous Dilwara group.

It enjoyed royal munificence abundantly. The presiding deity Lord Siva demonstrated many sports to cementing devotees' faith in Him; and so became a popular powerful deity. It treasures up an emblem of Siva's toe duly installed in the garbha griha. Just below the emblem there lies a small hole and it connects the earth to Patalaloka, says the priest. And thereby hangs a fascinating tale. According to story, Dharavarsha, a Paramara king, being a doubting Thomas by nature, pooh-poohed at the popular belief. Going further, he decided to disprove the blind belief. Towards this end, he ordered water to be poured down the hole with a view to falsifying the
prevalent belief. Hundreds of servants toiled hard for six long months to filling the hole unceasingly, but in vain. The thirst of the hole seemed unquenchable and so there was no sign of water touching the brim. Poor egoistical skeptic regretting retreated from the scene with a heavy price, at it, as it were. As he incurred the wrath of Achaleswar, he met with a terrible curse that gulped down his dynasty abruptly. Scepticism cannot play with theism. Would Siva let His devotees ruled by iconoclasts and atheists?

This lies atop the Mount Abu, in the state of Rajasthan accessible by four wheelers from the Railway Station lying at its foot and Ambaji, the great pilgrim centre near it.

[Box: TEMPLES IN UTTAR PRADESH]

36 ALMORA - JAGESWAR MAHADEV MANDIR

This place is claimed by some devout theists as one of the seats of Dwadasa Jyotirlingas. Situated in the midst of high hills with Deodar monarchs, it enchants the nature lovers more, but visited by pious Saivites throughout the year. Its finest sculpture attracts art critics as well, in addition to bhaktas. Being an ancient shrine, it contains all the worshipful Saivite deities installed according to sastric injunctions, and worship is offered regularly with devotional fervour due. The periodical festivals celebrated on grand scale lure thousands of devotees.

37 BAGESWAR - MAHADEV MANDIR

Another Siva temple of great antiquity lying in the vicinity and worthy of visitation in Almora region is Bageswar Mahadev Mandir. This famous Siva temple, on account of its location at the confluence of sacred rivers
Sarayu and Gomati claims another sacrosanct plus point for its sacredness and unenviable attraction for ritualistic prayers. Devout Hindus visit this to worshipping Lord Siva and offering pindas to manes at the confluence. So it is akin to Banaras in the performance of many devotional activities throughout the year. Situated at a high attitude, and attracting the aristocrat elite, the cream of highly educated society as it is an ideal summer resort, it is visited by multinationals throughout the year.

It lies 90 km off Almora enjoying all transport facilities and Jageswar Mahadev Mandir is 3 km off Almora.

38 PITHOGRARH - THAL KEDAR SIVA MANDIR

This town bordering on Nepal and Tibet is the treasure house of historic temples. The Thal Kedar temple enshrines a grand Sivalinga and attracts large number of theists throughout the year. During the Mahasivaratri annual festival, a big fair is conducted and it lures lakhs of people. It contains all the Saivate gods duly installed in befitting niches. On account of its location bordering the foreign countries, and worship by multinational is, its plus point to the envy of similar shrines.

It lies 6 km off Pithogarh, the district head quarters town of the same name, accessible by all transport facilities.

39 DEHRADUN - TAPKESHWAR MANDIR

This renowned Siva temple is an ancient one, attracting tourists and theists alike. Situated at a high altitude, the city and its environs cast irresistible charm on joyous youth, undertaking trekking adventures. This temple being very near to the city throbbing with educational and religious activities, it exercises greater fascination for pious people than the moderners. It contains many images of Saivate gods along with a big Sivalinga
receiving regular worship. Its dimensions and architectural excellences are moderate, yet the Siva mahima emanating from the Linga attracts and consoles the adorers.

It lies 5 km off the town and is accessible by city bus upto Garhi and from there one has to walk half-a kilometre.

**UTTARAKASI - SIVA MANDIR**

This is a spiritual haven meant exclusively for Bhagavadhaaradhana. So it is totally bereft of industrial or commercial establishments. Only temples and charitable institutions are carrying on spiritual activities. So its name quite appropriate. Just as in Kasi, the main mandir shrines a big Sivalinga in addition to other Saivate gods. Here are many kunds and bathing ghats for the convenience of the pious bhaktas. Tranquility seems stationed in this small temple town, as aged persons, sadhus of every denomination greet the eyes everywhere in this holy place. As it is on the way to Gangotri and Yamunotri the most holy pilgrim centres, thousands of yatris visit throughout the year. Moreover, its trekking potentialities are attracting the youth also, since it serves a base for their further onward march. Ebullient youth and the tattering aged seem vying with one other, the former for demonstration of physical prowess and the latter for display of spiritual heights they can ascend through meditation etc.

It lies on the way to Gangotri from Rishikesh.

**AYODHYA - NAGESWARA MAHADEV MANDIR**

Though this entire Punyadharitri of Ayodhya and its suburb Saketa is soaked in Rama mahima i.e. Vaishnavism, it is not bereft of Saivate temples, nor is it inimical towards Saivates. There are many Sivaalayas here and there and moreover some Vaishnavate temples are
also housing Sivalingas or images of Parvathi, Eswar, Ganesha and Subrahmanya. Sectarian dogmatism is conspicuous by its absence. Would Rama endure fanaticism in any shape? That Dharmavathar holds the scales even eternally. This is evidenced by the existence of Nageswara Mahadev shrine on the Swargadwara Ram ghat, one of many pious bathing ghats that the holy Sarayu river is provided with. This shrine is dedicated to Mahadev and it goes by the name of Nageswar Mahadev mandir. It enshrines an enchanting Sivalinga. So pilgrims taking bath in the Sarayu, offer their first prayer to Siva only. What an oddity that in a Vaishnavate kshetra, Prathama puja is offered to Siva! This is the true spirit of Catholocity that Hinduism embodies and teaches. And Indianness pervading here in its untainted state. Kudos to the saint seers, who not only advocated universality through their immortal writings, but caused the erection of temples to putting into practice their ennobling high ideals.

It is a famous All-India pilgrim centre, commanding all transport facilities from any corner of the world. The last rail head is Fizabad from where journey can be made by auto, taxi, bus or even by tonga.

42 HARIDWAR - MAHADEV MANDIRS

Nowhere in our Akhanda Bharat that one can see the spectale of glory of Hinduism as in Haridwar. Here one can observe theism in motion and observance of ritualistic worship in its pristine purity. It is the permanent seat of all the highest divinities, and the temples built in and around the holy river Ganges, house every worshipful god adorning the Hindu pantheon. Though Vaishnavate name it bears - Haridwar means the gateway to Hari's Vaikuntha, it contains several temples dedicated to Sakti, Siva, Hanuma, Brahma etc. Among the Saivate temples, mention must be made of Bilkeswara Mahadev temple, Shrawannath Mandir, and Dakshineswar Mahadev Mandir, although the images of Siva, or portraits of Siva and Parvathi are properly installed and worshipped in almost
all the temples dedicated to Vishnu or Sakthi. Let us visit ancient temples one after another.

**SHRAVANNATH TEMPLE**

It is dedicated to Pasupathinath and is located in Subzi Mandi area of the town. The unusual magnificence of the icon lures the devotees most. The spiritual sublimity hovering over there fills the souls with Sivamahima and raises hands in prayer. Agamic worship is offered here. Adjacent to this lies Pataleswara Mahadev temple and it also enshrines Sivalinga and other icons. The temples may lack huge dimensions and enchanting sculptural adornments, but the pervading Sivamahima is elevating, ennobling and chastening to be brief.

**BILKESWARA MAHADEV MANDIR**

It is dedicated to Siva and lies to the west of railway station. Here offering of bilva leaves is given top priority and hence the name Bilkiswara Mahadev. Next, the Dakshineswara Mahadev temple situated in Kankhal, a suburb of this holy thirtha kshetra lies on the otherside of the river. It was built in commemoration of Lord Siva's descent from Kailas at this very spot to take the corpse of Sati after immolation. And it is here all the gods appeared to appease Lord Siva's anger and to save Daksha from annihilation. The Sivalinga is quite impressive and devotees worship it with Ganges water as done at Banaras. These places are sanctified by the association of Siva and Sati. Hence visitation for adoration with unusual exuberance of religious zeal.

All these lie in Haridwar, the pilgrim centre of All India importance. So every transport facility is available round the clock.

**43 ALLAHABAD - MAHADEV MANDIR**

The historic fort of Allahabad treasures up many
Hindu relics and envisages the glory of Hinduism. Here is found evidence in abundance of the orthodox practices and good old traditions that glorified theism, though mortified the agnosticism. Let us enter and see one after another for full grasp. As said, this fort has been the centre of attraction for all classes of people. It is a spiritual haven and a treasure house of innumerable Hindu relics. It is here the far-famed Akahaya Vata is situated. Devout pilgrims worship it with great ardour, performing several rituals. This is also the place, where religious frenzy manifested, like committing religious suicide, though sastras specifically condemn this practice in well-defined terms. As some scriptures advocate this atmahan — suicide as prayaschitta for the guilt of mahapataka, many take recourse to this evil practice. Old and invalid, desperate and perverted fall from its high branches to end themselves, hoping to be released from the cycle of births and deaths once for all. Next to it lies a grand Sivalinga in a beautiful small shrine. After completing circumambulation, pious people take vows to give up for the rest of their lives, the pleasure of eating one particular item of food, which till then held very dear to them. So it marks the beginning of a new phase of spiritual upgradation. Many orthodox Hindus fail not to worship this Lord and also take vows to turn new pages in their lives. There are some more Saivate shrines built in recent times. Their architecture and sculpture beckon attention and adoration due. Among them, the South Indian temple housing all the Saivate gods in extremely well-built minishrines deserves indispensable visitation.

It is a famous city politically, spiritually and commercially, hence enjoying all facilities - railways airways.

**44**

**JOSHIMATH**

This is

Adi Sankar years
evidenced by his founding of monasteries and erecting of temples together with the dedication of his works to the Lord, when he dwelt here fully immersed in meditation and composition of master pieces. So, sacred to all. There is a temple dedicated to Narasimha in which Badarinath is worshipped during the winter. It is on the way to Badari and no pilgrim worth the name misses this holy place. The place where he lived is made into a mandir with idols of Siva and other Saivate gods. Even at Badari, where he established one of the Principal monasteries called Uttaram nya Jyotirmath, there is a Sivalinga along with other gods like Subrahmanya, Ganesh and Gowri. They are adored regularly and devoutly.

It lies on the way to Badari. Only bus journey is available.

45

AGRA - SIVA MANDIR

This ancient, yet recently rebuilt Siva Mandir by British devotees bears an eloquent testimony to the Omnicompassion of Lord Maheswar. Lord Siva never lets down His adorers, nor should they ever think of switching over their loyalty to some other agency human or divine. Believers, with unconditional total surrender were emancipated beyond their expectation. This is the tangible, solidified truth that no force on earth disproved it so far.

This small Siva Mandir on the bank of Jamuna rescued colonel Martin of British army from the jaws of death in the military operations carried against Afghans in 1880, in which the British was routed. It happened that Lady Martin in her desperate mood of not receiving any news of her husband’s where abouts chanced to enter the temple, and when she poured out her heart to the priest, he advised the performance of ritualistic worship for 11 days. When done with all austerity due, she received the tidings of her husband’s miraculous escape from enemy and was returning soon. After happy union, the convinced couple, realising the infinite mercy of the Lord, turned staunch Siva bhaktas and rebuilt the ancient Sivaalaya which has gained reputation and developed into a grand
This shrine contains all the Saivite gods and is attracting the foreigners more than the natives, since Martin couple propagated the Sivamahima effectively.

It is in Agra on the bank of Jamuna commanding all transport facilities.

**RISHIKESH - NEELAKANTA MAHADEV MANDIR**

Nestled in the high Himalayas at a height of 5500 feet, this good old Siva Mandir luring devout bhaktas since time immemorial. Its vicinity to Rishikesh and on the top of upper Himalayan region strewn over with yugas old temples, like Badarinath, Kedarnath, Uttarakasi etc. its attraction for orthodox Saivates is great. For the people of Gharwal district and citizens of Rishikesh and Haridwar, its attraction is decidedly great. They congregate on all important days and periodical festivals in huge numbers and celebrate them with devotion due.

Though it is a temple with modest dimensions, its antiquity and divinity are exerting great pull on the devotees. As the devotees proceed from Rishikesh, their eyes and ears are feasted with the lovely sights of Himalayan peaks and low dales with eyeeful green scenes of forest beauty and song birds on wing. Their experience becomes unforgettable when they reach and avail the darsan of the Lord and all the worshipful Saivate deities.

It is 15 km off Rishikesh accessible by four wheelers and pious people reach by walking the entire distance.

**TEMPLES IN BIHAR**

**JANAKPUR - SIVA MANDIR**

Janakpur, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Mithila of legendary king Janaka, possesses some rare
spiritual treasures in the form of temples dedicated to several deities and sages. Among them the Saivate temples stand out supreme in points of number and exquisite architecture. Temples like Kapaleeswara, Kupeeswara, Kalyaneeswara, Jaleswara, Ksheereswara and Mithileswara signify the magnitude of Saivaaradhana and the influence of Siva even in the past. In all these shrines regular prayer services are being offered to Sivalingas since time immemorial. Near about these holy shrines are found the sites for asrams, where sages like Gautama, Yagnavalkya, Valmiki, Viswamitra lived either temporarily or permanently. The area thus sanctified by their association was chosen rightly for construction of shrines for Rama, Janaki, Dasaratha etc. A right choice and befitting honour! The mandirs mentioned above houses all the worshipful deities installed in the befitting mini-mandirs.

This lies at a distance of 35 km to Janakpur railway station in the state of Bihar. Road journey can be made from Darbhanga in buses and four wheelers.

### PATNA - SIVA MANDIR

This holy city, in addition to enshrining two Saktipithas — Bara Patan Devi and Chota Patan Devi, built at the spots, where Mother Sati's pat-saree fell, when Mahavishnu, cut her corpse during lord Siva's carrying her, also claims one modest temple where Sivalinga is worshipped and prayer services are offered according to Saivagamas. May be due to predominance of Saktipithas, this shrine is neither adorned with due sculptural art, nor blessed with magnetic pull as the other Sakti Mandirs. Yet, it has all necessary parts of a temple. This was built recently. Here one can feast his eyes with a charming Sivalinga and ears with Siva-sama mahima. Ardent devotees visit it regularly. All festivals as conducted in the Sivaalayas are celebrated annually.

It lies in the centre of the capital and so accessible by all types of vehicles.
KHEKPARTA - ASTASAMBHUS SIVA TEMPLE

Astagamnhus temple is a new concept, and worshipping eight Sivalingas at one place, at a time was an extant tradition in Bihar. It is a medieval legacy and was so extensively popularised by the rulers and spiritualists, that Orrisa, inspired by the novelty of this pattern built Siva temples in many places on that model, but with a difference. And, as if to outbeat Bihar, there emerged several Sivatrayas enshrining five hundred lingas least in me and the same temple complex itself. Lingaraj temple in Bhuvaneswar testifies to this tradition even today.

This Khekpatra temple at Benesagar in the district of Singhbhum of Bihar houses eight Sivalingas, though its splendour and sculptural marvels are in ruins. It is lying atop an isolated high hill like rock, enshrining a linga only, but at the foot of the hill lie seven more miniature minishrines to complete the traditional number, as it were. This has a curvilinear sikhtara resembling the tower of the Puri Jagannath temple. Hence it appears to represent a harmonious blend of Orrisan and Bihar Astasambhu temple models inviting reverent attention of the pious bhaktas, who gain the merit of worshipping eight lingas at one time in one place, if visited and adored. In the vicinity of this famous Astasambhu temple, there are many more groups of temples, all but in dilapidated condition. Another queerness greeting the eyes here is, the presiding linga is biggest in size and shape than the other seven satellite lingas. There are Saivite gods installed in minishrines as found elsewhere.

It lies at a distance of 80 km from Charbasa in the district of Singhbhum of Bihar state, enjoying bus service from the district headquarters town.

SULTANGANJ - AJGAIVINATH TEMPLE

This flourishing town had a glorious past and earned a great name for building up commendable traditions. Its
old name was Jahangira which derived from the name of sage Jahnu, who lived here then. According to legend, the river Ganga during its course, turned turbulent and disturbed the tranquility of this place, where Maharshi Jahnu was lost in meditation. To humble its pride, as it were, he gulped down its whole mass at a single draught. When Bhagiratha appealed to him to release it, he let it out through his ear. It was fittingly called then Jahnugriha, where Jahnu was dwelling. Later it became corrupted and went by the name of Jahangira. In the Muslim period it was changed to Sultanganj, redolent of Muslim culture, yet it houses many relics of Jain, Buddhist and Hindu relics of great utility and universal significance.

Regarding its name Ajgaivinath, legends embody many accounts saying that it is here, Lord Siva gave His potent bow-Ajgav to His devotee, and so the place was called Ajgaivinath. Moreover, this place was an integral part of ancient Anga country ruled by Karna of Mahabharat fame with Champanagar as his capital. And Sultanganj is a part of that great country. So doubly famous. During the reign of Pala dynasty, it was here the foundation was laid for the Vikramasila University of global importance.

This hoary Ajgaivinath temple houses a Swayambhu linga. It is built on a rock and is adorned with marvellous sculptural pieces. The wall panels are extremely superb and far surpass their counterparts found elsewhere. The temple is washed by the holy waters of Ganga, and the entire landscape is quite picturesque. It is one of three very famous Siva temples of Bihar, the others being Basukinath near Dumka and the last one Vaidyanath at Deogarh in Santal parganas. They attract huge crowds regularly, and on annual festivals Shivaratri, their number exceeds lakhs. It is a great pilgrim centre.

It lies in Sultanganj, one of the advancing cities of Bhagalpur district, and it is a railhead on the loopline of the Eastern Railway running from Calcutta to Kuil.

**MASARĀH- SIVA TEMPLE**

The village of Masarāh situated in the Sahabad district of Bihar, is enshrining several relics of great
importance. It is associated with the pouranic characters, like Sri Krishna, Banasura, Usha and Aniruddha and it was called then Padmavathipura. Later it became Mahasara during the hey day of Jains, meaning thereby a big tank; and it measured 52 bighas of land then. Some legends credit it with being the capital of Aniruddha, and a few ascribe it to that place called Mallahesanrn, said to have been built by Banasura for wrestling bouts. All these names reflect the former glory of this great place.

At present, only Buddhist relics, Jain Mandirs and same Hindu temples are strewn over the entire area. As Banasura was a great Siva Bhakta, Saivism enjoyed its full sway during his days and later too. When Jain influence established rule over this land, it started erecting many mandirs. But the locals, being staunch Saivates raised hue and cry and succeeded in installing Sivalingsas in many Jain Mandirs. A great achievement indeed. There is a Sivalinga now in the Parasnath Jain temple receiving worship according to Saivagamas. It is facing east and temple has an excellent dome on the top. Periodical festivals are celebrated with great fervour. In Sravana masas, special pujas are offered. All the Saivate gods like Ganesha, Karthikeya, Nandi are fittingly installed for worship. It also contains Devi temple just opposite, housing the icons of Saraswati, Vishnu etc.

Indeed it is a matter of great pride and monumental achievement of the locals, whose religious tenacity and invincible faith subdued the all-devouring greed of Jainism. And lo ! it claimed and occupied rightly the rightful place for Siva in the well-built, masterly sculptured and lavishly spent Jain Mandir. A Jain Mandir housing a Sivalinga is a unique of uniques and luring devotees in large numbers more than the Jain adorers. A visit-worthy kshetra.

It lies 3 km off Karisath railway station on the Eastern Railway in the district of Sahabad of Bihar. And is accessible by four wheelers from Karisath.
BENUSAGAR - ASHTA SAMBHU TEMPLE

On the eastern embankment of Benusagar tank in the Singhbhum district of Bihar, there is a sacred place called Devasthan, where invaluable sculptural pieces from the ruined temples are placed by the archeological department. It houses in its enclosure several remains of ancient temples both in mutilated and well preserved condition. Among them, there are eight phallic emblems of Siva together with foundations of four temples. The materials used for them were bricks and stones - chlorite and laterite as well. The existence of eight lingas prove that there were eight Siva temples in the past with all the Saivite gods enshrined in a befitting manner in the side niches. Though regular worship is not conducted, nor periodical festivals are celebrated, the Ashtasambhus preserved in the Devasthan are drawing the attention of theists and religionists. Despite their glory is obscured and chronicles are silent, the novelty of the number and oddity deserve reverent attention and visitation for adoration.

It lies 10 km off Majgaon in the Singhbhum district of Bihar accessible by four wheelers from several towns nearby.

SINGHESWAR - SINGHESWAR MAHADEO TEMPLE

It is one of the famous ancient temples of Bihar, visited by a steady stream of visitors throughout the year, despite lacking in transport facilities; and subjected to the vagaries of river Kosi, which inundates several parts, making the region unfordable. As the Lord has been mercifully and timely coming to the succour of the distressed, it is regarded as the beacon light, and source of solace to the people, living in these parts. The holy linga is said to have been installed by Rishyasringa, who performed Putrakameshti yaga in Ayodya for the Santanapraphti of King Dasaratha. This archamurti is
asitaparijata and showers boons in profusion, if prayed with pure devotion. Barren women are blessed with children, on ardent prayers lasting for a certain period with rituals due. This ancient shrine was renovated by a Bhagalpur merchant spending huge sums of money, realising the potentialities of the kshetra and the presiding deity.

The glory of this temple finds a place is Varahapuram. According to it, once Lord Siva left for Slesh Atmak forest, for meditation, informing Nandikeswar not to divulge His whereabouts to any. It was at this time, Brahma, Vishnu and Indra visited Nandikeshwar and asked him about Siva's presence. When denied, they went in search of Siva. Lord Siva, seeing them approaching changed Himself into a deer. On recognition, they tried to catch Him. Indra succeeded in catching the top portion of horn; Brahma middle of it and Vishnu the root. When they gave a pull, the horn broke into three pieces, and the deer too disappeared. They heard an aerial voice that Lord Siva would not be found to them and they must be satisfied with the horn pieces they were in possession of. Indra installed his piece, in heaven; Brahma there itself, whereas Maha Vishnu installed it in Bhuloka for the salvation of humanity. And that sacrosanct place was called then Singheswar. Later a suitable temple was built and a Sivalinga along with other gods were installed for regular worship. Due to raining of boons by the Lord, the place became a great yatrasthala.

The annual Sivaratri festival lures lakhs of devotees; a Mela-cattle fair too is held, and it is deemed to be the biggest next to that of Sonepur Mela in Bihar state.

It lies 12 km off Madhipura on the Sonepur-Kathihar railway line of North Eastern Railway, and from there four wheelers have to be engaged for reaching the temple.

Bakreswar - Siva Temple

The district of Birbhum is blessed with several places of worship for men of all faiths. Among them,
Bakreswar occupies a pre-eminent place for several reasons, like the Tantriks attained Siddhi by the grace of these gods; they attracted pilgrims throughout the year; their hot water springs cured many physical maladies etc. On account of these plus points, many legends fantastic were woven round and made it an indispensable centre of pilgrimage for orthodox Hindus. Among the exciting tales, Brahma's getting rid of the sin of marrying His own daughter after praying to this Lord; Gouri's marrying Siva after propitiating the presiding deity of this Bakreswar; restoring of the vanished light of the Sun god with the mercy of this Lord; relieving of Bhairav's mental anguish after worship the Lord here etc. etc. etc. take precedence over others. The river Bakreswar popularly called Papahar river too is very famous and occupied a high place in the Puranas for possessing miraculous powers, like ridding the bathers of their sins and ailments. The hot water springs of high medicinal value too raised its banner higher and turned it out into a famous pilgrim cum tourist centre with unlimited potentialities. So, there is nothing wrong in the belief current — "At other places, the deities live in an inhabited village, but at Bakreswar men live for the deities". So it was called an idyllic Devagram. The annual mela of Bakreswar held during Sivaratri draws lakhs of devotees and turn this into Bhuloka Kailas with all kinds of devotional activities.

The temple's architectural design too is quite enticing and enchants the devotees.

It lies about 10 km off Dubrajpur railway station on the Ondal — Sainthia section of the Eastern Railway, and from there four wheelers take the intending devotees to the temple.

55 KONCH - KONCHESWARA MAHADEV TEMPLE

This is a much controversial temple. Eminent and world famous scholars, archeologists and historians wrangled over it for long and produced their own findings — some
claiming it to be a Buddhist Chaitya, and others refuting it established that it was a Hindu temple dedicated to Koncheswara, one of the names of Maheswar. As it resembles the famous Mahabodhi temple of Bodh Gaya, the opinion of the scholars is not unanimous. Whatever may be the verdict arrived at with colour glasses or no glasses, the temple is an ancient one enshrining a Sivalinga, representing Maheswar. Its tower, structural design and ornamentation resemble ancient Hindu temples and it bears a striking resemblance to Dev and Umga temples in Gaya district.

It is a largely visited temple and pujas offered conform to the Saivagama injunctions. During Sivaratri festival and other auspicious days, thousands of locals and yatris participate in several devotional activities with unprecedented religious zeal. A mela conducted during Sivaratri festival lures lakhs of people. It is a neglected one, and if adequate attention is paid by bringing it under protected monuments, its glory once again touch the pinnacle to the contentment of devout Hindus.

It lies about 25 km off Gaya on the Gaya Danbad National Highway and accessible from Gaya railway station by four wheelers.

**TEMPLES IN WEST BENGAL**

**56 BAHURALA - SIDDHESWAR MANDIR**

This ancient Siva temple of West Bengal is highly renowned for its sculptural ornamentation and architectural style. It is regarded as the finest specimen of brick built Rekha Duel of medieval period. It bears resemblance to Orissan temple models. The exterior of the temple is adorned with fine ornamentation. It contains all the worshipful Saivate deities installed in a befitting manner. It was built in Pala period. It reflects the patron’s commendable refinement and munificent endowments. It is luring both theists and tourists alike.
It lies 5 km off Onda railway station and is on the bank of river called Dwarakeswar.

**57 VISHNUPUR - SHAILESWAR MANDIR**

This 900-year-old holy temple lies very near to Vishnupur and is visited by Saivates and Vaishnavates alike throughout the year. Vicinity to the city and easy transport facilities make it very popular.

It lies 8 km of Vishnupur, the cultural centre of Bengal and is enjoying all transport facilities.

**EKTESWARA - EKAPADESWARA MANDIR**

It is strange but true that Lord Siva once fancied to possess only one leg, although retaining all other organs as bipeds. The very concept of one legged Siva Ekapadeswar evokes wonder coupled with fear than instant adoration. This queer Ekapadeswar representation finds place in a temple at Ekteswara in Bengal, prominently, although it has similar images in some temples.

**Temple Complex**

Here the icon is called Ekteswara Siva, perhaps due to its location in the village called Ekteswara which it appears derived from the deity installed therein. It seems they are inter-dependent. It is a black linga of about one foot in height and moreover deemed Swayambhu linga, having thrust itself up through the ground. It is installed in a dark well like enclosure inside a big temple called Ekteswara Sivaalaya. The temple is quite ancient, but was repaired several times by the theist kings and ardent public. It contains an extra-ordinary image of Siva, in one of His manifestations called Rudra murti Ekapada. This rare image is not of imposing stature, nor is chesilled by master sculptor, yet it has characteristic features visible enough to treat it a Ekapada Rudramurti. Though standing on
one leg, this image holds in his right hand potent weapons, like dhanus, ghanta, kapala, kaumud, targani, ghata, parasu and chakra; and still more dreadful weapons such as khatvanga, bana, dhamaru, wheel, mudgara, varada, akshamala and trisula in the left hand. Would not such awful ayudhas strike terror into the minds of evil-doers? They do. Yet, they infuse confidence, that a wielder of such all-destructive weapons would not desert the adorers at any time, nor torture them without proper cause. Is there any solitary instance of that All — Merciful letting down any bhakta? Or teasing even for a second for fun?

The Temple

This strange temple is situated beside the river Dwarakeshwar in Ekteswara. It does not look like a Bangla Mandir, but resembles the Rekha deul minus sikhar of the Orissan temples. Another strange feature that strikes the visitors’ eye is — the walls are completely denuded of any carvings or paintings. As the worshipful Sivalinga is installed in well-like structure, one has to reach it by descending many steps. Further, the place is not duly illumined with lamps made of either brass, or baked mud. It is with the help of the small pramida lit by the priest, one has to see and worship HIM. The darkness and odd environs evoke wonder than devotion. Yet, huge number of theists turn up on Mondays and offer reverential puja with all the paraphernalia as seen in Sivaalayas. Chaitra masa sees its glory reaching the summit with several festivals and processions spread over the entire month.

It lies in the village of Ekteswara in the vicinity of Bankura the district head quarters of the same name. It is accessible by train or bus and from Bankura, by rickshaws or tongas.

CALCUTTA - DHAKSHINESWAR MANDIR

Introduction

Calcutta the seat of Saktipitha and centre of hectic sociopolitical activities is justly famous for its religious catholocity and
universality of spirit. It contains hundreds of small and big shrines in and out of its bounds. Though Saktism predominates over others, all religions and every sect find their places of worship. But it is a pity that very few separate, independent Sivaayás of great eminence and antiquity are found justifying its supremacy. Of course, some temples are housing the portraits or images of Lord Siva, but not the Sivalingas of stupendous size. It is only in the Dakshineswar Kali temple, big Sivalingas in separate minishrines are housed. And lo! there are twelve exclusive shrines, each enshrining a modest size of Sivalinga and is receiving regular prayers. This Dakshineswara Kali temple is very near the Belur Math, but separated by the river Hooghly, and 20 km off the Hourah station enjoying taxi, auto, tonga and bus services. There is another one called Bangeswar Mahadev temple near Hourah.

**SRI BANGESWARA MAHADEV TEMPLE**

The very remembrance of Sri Bangeswar Mahadev mandir lying in the midst of a sprawling garden with fountains of different sizes surrounding the colourful flower plants, sends thrills in the spines of Hindus, living in its near-abouts and hastens them for worship and pleasure; for its recreational potentialities seem vying with spiritual solace. Bengalis, being the staunch worshippers of Sakti, normally regard Siva as an ignoramus nomad, and underrate Him with the label 'Bhola Shankar', which means implicitly that He is innocent and deserves to be adored next to MOTHER Kali only. Hence there are only a few mandirs built here and there exclusively for Siva. Among them this one is very popular.

This is housing as many as eight Saivite divinities, like Vinayaka, Mother Parvathi, Subrahmanya etc., in befitting niches around the main shrine and are worshipped according to Bengali traditions. Among the periodical festivals Jhulanotsava celebrated with unprecedented pomp and splendour with bhajans, discourses, Rasalila etc draws huge crowds. The devotees' piety then seems vying with their gaiety. The very place set up in silvan environs has such a magnetic pull that many adorers turn aesthetes and visit frequently deeming it both a picnic spot and place of worship. It is a modern one constructed in 1953, in memory of late Sri Banshidhar and was inaugurated by the state former Chief Minister Dr. Bidhan Chandra.

It lies at Salkia School Road, Hourah and is accessible by bus, auto, tonga etc.
TARAKESWAR - SIVA MANDIR

This Tarakeswar Siva Mandir although is an ancient one in the Hooghly region, it is maintained well. This shrine, as most of the mandirs in Bengal is simple and bereft of loftiness in construction and occupation. It consists of only two parts-the first portion is called porch and appears like Bengali hut, and the other is garbha griha enshrining the Sivalinga in the middle. It has a tank for the convenience of visiting devotees. As it is surrounded by houses on all sides, its eminence is some what less conspicuous, yet it is attracting the devotees throughout the year. On Sivaratri and Charak Sankranti, the annual festivals, thousands gather and participate in the celebration with great religious fervour.

It lies near Serampore railway station and can be reached from Calcutta by buses or other four wheelers too.

BARKAR - SIVA MANDIR

The Burdwan district of Bengal is deservedly famous for some strange type of Mandirs. It boasts of fours and they are concentrated at the village Barkar in the Asansol sub division of the district. They have several oddities and strangely enough are dedicated to Saivate gods, like Ganesh and Siva. Here is the peculiarity - the Siva linga is installed on a fish shaped panavatta, unlike the common circular one drawn to a point on the north. Moreover, it has holes for the linga to stand. The temples are surmounted by urns, but not spires, and have all the parts like antarala, mahamandapa, mandapa, courtyards and tower. Of the four, one is dedicated to Siva. And it enshrines a big Sivalinga installed on an argha measuring 4 feet 7 inches in diameter. Another oddity it is built of stone unlike the Bengali mandirs. Inscriptions confirm the construction to fifteenth century and it is said to have been built by one devotee called Harischandra.

It lies on the left bank of Barkar river and about 200 km off Calcutta.
The Gopbhum region of the Burdwan district is rich in Saivism and temple worship. Though there are temples for Sakti and Vaishnavate gods, the temples dedicated to Siva have characteristic local colour that set them apart from others. They were built by the Maharaja Taj Chandra Bahadur. Their speciality lies in the constructional pattern, first and last. They are hundred and eight in number and are arranged in concentric circles; the outer one consisting of 66, enshrining black and white lingams installed alternately; whereas in the inner circle there are 42 temples, each with a black stone linga only. They are built close to one another except for passage to go from one to another. Each of the temples is provided with a circular domed cell and a pedestal in the centre for the linga. The Tantric scriptures enjoin the worship of 108 phallic emblems of Siva at one place and it has mystic significance, believed to be productive of great religious merit. It ensures special merits, like the warding off the adorer from loss of caste, social degradation, extinction of race, and fatal disease too. Belief, besides giving relief momentary assures them with carefree earthly existence. Hence building by the royalty for their own safety and public prosperity in this odd style.

There are temples here also dedicated to Krishna and others testifying to the religious tolerance and magnanimity of the kings. They contain all the parts with gods for worship in the traditional method.

They lie at Kalna, a big town and the headquarters town of the same name commanding all transport facilities.

Among several temples built for Sakti, Vishnu and Siva in the twenty four parganas of Bengal, particularly in the villages of Bhatpara, Kumarabatta and Halisahar, a large number of Siva temples deserve mention and visitation for adoration. Though this region was under the strong
influence of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the staunch Vaishnavate of Bengal, Saivism was not completely thrown out. There are many Siva temples though found in decadent condition now, are testifying to the glory of Saivism in their heyday. Their superb execution and masterly finish with sculptural adornments on the walls and ceilings, speak volumes of the builders’ magnanimity and adorers’ preference for Siva and Saivate gods. Moreover, this area was a great centre of Hindu culture and deemed highly advanced in learning, especially in the ancient lore treasured up in the Sanskrit language. The temples too were built in the extant models of charachala, pancharatna and Navaratna types, and their grandeur and imposing statures wring veneration. Besides these Siva temples, this whole region is scattered with temples built for Sakti and Vaishnavate gods.

Those temples are accessible by four wheelers from Calcutta commanding every transport facility round the clock.

MANKAR - MANKESWAR SHIVA MANDIR

The Burdwan district of Bengal is the citadel of several religious sects, apart from Hinduism in its multifarious aspects, like Saivism, Sakteism, Vaishnavism etc. There were built hundreds and hundreds of temples for Saivate gods, and other most adorable gods of Hindu pantheon. The villages of Amaragarh, Barakar and Mankar housed number of Sivaalayas in the past; but all of them except Dugdheswar Siva Mandir, Mankeshwar Mahadev Mandir and Shivakya Devi Mandir are in ruins. And the existing ones also are not maintained, as it was in their heyday.

Mankar, a village dominated by the Brahmins in the past has a few temples dedicated to Siva and Sakti, going by the local names of Mankeshwar Shiva and Ananda Mayee Sakti. The object of worship is, of course, linga and the temples like their counter elsewhere has mandaps, mahamandaps, antaralas etc. Among the Saivate
deities adorning the minishrines the images of Ganesh takes precedence over others. Though times changed, traditions yielded to foreign impact, these groups of temples are receiving public worship regularly, and the periodical festivals are carried on with devotion due.

These temple are accessible by four wheelers from Burdwan and Dhanbad towns, commanding all facilities.

65 DANTAN - SYAMALESWAR TEMPLE

In the Midnapore district of Bengal, there are many temples dedicated to the gods of major cults of Hinduism, like Sakti, Siva, Vishnu etc. Dantan, due to lying on the border of the state of Orissa shares many traditions and customs of Oriyas. A harmonious blend of two cultures is discernable, if deeper examination is undertaken. This cultural interchange was forged by the groups of devotees visiting both in their two-way traffic.

It is here in the town of Dantan, the favourite place of halt of the pilgrims on account of the availability of all amenities, many temples came up displaying a synthesis of two distinct cultures. The temple of Syamaleswar possessing Saivite gods and Sivalinga in the sanctum sanctorum is an example to the point in question. An imposing majestic image of Nandi, the divine vehicle of Lord Siva, installed at the entrance greets the theists first. Several worshipful gods are duly set up and their craftsmanship lifts the souls. Alas ! the ruthless iconoclast Kalaphar multilated the splendour of Nandi by cutting off the forelegs; yet its dignified bearing bends heads in veneration at its first sight even. A large tank lying opposite supplies the devotees with its pure water for bath and drink. The tall Sikhara built with trisul atop joins hands of the devotees, who utter Harahar Mahadev when it gleams into their sight.

It lies 60 km off Midnapore, on the Orissa Trunk Road and itself is a railhead of the same name on the South Eastern Railway.
GUWAHATI - UMANANDA SIVA MANDIR

This capital city of Assam State, besides housing the famous Kamakhya temple, dedicated to Makali, built on the Nilachala hill contains a Siva temple called Umananda temple. It is situated on a small hill in the peacock island of the holy river Brahmaputra. When the original temple was washed away by the floods of river Brahmaputra, a modern attractive structure with many pavilions for parivaradevatas, like Ganesh, Durga, Surya, Parvathi etc. was built by Rajeswar Gupta, a devout Saivate devotee. The sculptural adornments on the walls, and the curvilinear tower cast enchantment of the visitors. The Sivalinga in the garbha griha is quite attractive. This temple is popularly called as Negriting temple, besides Umananda Mandir too. It is visited by all Hindu devotees throughout the year. The annual Sivaratri festival draws thousands of bhaktas.

It lies near Guwahati, the state capital enjoying all facilities of transport.

TEMPLE IN TRIPURA

Introduction

Tripura - a tiny modern state, one of the many similar ones of the Indian union lying to the east of East Bengal is treasuring up many ancient Hindu relics in the form of old temples and architectural remains. From the inscriptions and the ancient monuments in ruins, the archeologists have unearthed the hidden glory of Hinduism, as a matter of fact. The state and its environs then went by the name of Tippera, and when it was under the domination of Mauryan kings, Hinduism raised its head and displayed its multidimensional splendour. But, the ruthless inroads made by Muslim bigots did incalculable destruction and effaced its glory. Yet, here and there, there are certain
monuments standing in proof of their former splendour.

UNAKOTI - KOILASAHAH

Among the surviving relics, one can see a rich spiritual treasure on the Unakoti hills. There is an abundant proof of magnificent temples built for both Vaishnavate and Saivate gods, but it is a pity that they were destroyed beyond recognition and identification. The Jagannatha temple with its huge dimensions and massive structures beckons the attention of the theists of not only Tripura but outsiders also. In its vicinity there lies a colossal rock cut head of Lord Siva, demanding indispensable visitation. It is bereft of supreme craftsmanship, or dazzling polish, yet one can discern sensitive modelling and neat execution of facial features, resembling the Elephanta cave carvings in the state of Maharashtra. It is a standing testimony of the extant Saivism prevalent then. Just as theists offer soulful prayers to the Trimurti or Siva images at Elephant caves, devout theists offer their prayers to this holy image and feel elated. Though not installed in a magnificent edifice, it is receiving adoration regularly by the ardent Saivates. Despite standing exposed to the fury of elements, this huge image is conferring boons to the adorers. Moreover, the entire hill front is covered with images of several Hindu gods. A worth seeing sight!

It lies at Unakoti - Koilasaheh and can be reached by four wheelers from Tripura, the capital.

TEMPLE IN ORRISA

BHUVANESWAR - LINGARAJ MANDIR

It is a reputed Harihara Kshetra, housing holy shrines for almost all Hindu gods, besides Jain Thirthankars and Boudha Pravaktas. Of all the places of worship here, priority goes to Lingaraj temple, one of the most finest temples built in the North Indian Nagara style. It may not be an exaggeration, if said that it is one of the best built Siva mandir of huge dimensions extant of our Punya Bharat. In size, shape and structure! Architecturally speaking, it stands out as the most superb type of temple enshrining a big Sivalinga that the ancient India has bequeathed to us. It has peers only in the deep south, like the Brihadeeswaraalayam, Ramalingeswaraalayam etc. to mention a few.
HISTORY AND GROWTH OF LINGARAJ TEMPLE

The lingaraj temple - a magnificent piece of architectural marvel is the gift of one single dynasty called Kesari, that ruled in the seventh century. It took the present shape after a long period of five centuries from the date of foundation to the installation of the deity. This imposing sculptural beauty dominates the area for miles around by its curvilinear tower measuring 147 feet in height. It was started by Yayati Kesari and completed by his grand son Lalithendu Kesari. Later Kamal Kesari added Bhoga Mandapa in the beginning of the tenth century. A little earlier, Parvathi Mandir was built by Vijaya Kesari. The final and the last addition of Nat mandir was made by the queen of Salani Kesari in 1104. To be sure, there is no other place, where one can see such continuity of buildings constructed chronologically as found here. Archaeologists did ample service to theism by bringing out its glory elaborately and effectively too.

The lord Lingaraj made of black stone measures 6 feet in height and is encircled by a stone rim drawn to a point towards the north. The sculptural beauty on the walls attracts all sections of people. The scenes depicting the marching army and the jewellery displayed are superb. Many miniature buildings - votive shrines - the replicas of the tower are found around the main temple, constructed by the donors from time to time. Alas! they are totally neglected by the management. Standing in ruins, due to inadequate attention, they seem shedding tears, to speak the truth. When caught between the wonder at the exquisitely chiselled and masterly embellished sculptural beauties, the handi-work of divine artists, and the despair at the sight of their miserable state near ruins of the subsidiary shrines, tears roll down the cheeks of the visitors involuntarily. Modernity with its craze for westernisation has totally forgotten their splendour and the divinity hovering over the entire area.

It lies in Bhubaneswar, the metropolitan capital of the state of Orissa, hence commanding all facilities.
DEOGARH - BAIKYANATH DHAM

Deogarh is infinitely praised for being one of the Saktipithas, and hailed exuberantly as the seat of Ravana Brahma linga. Its sanctity and uniqueness spring up from several other factors, like the temple tree putting forth leaves with letters in Hindi that confers wealth, to those who offer prayers sitting under pipal tree, and above all the cave soil of the temple turning into gold, when given by the priest once a year to the temple staff as payment for their services. The temple is built of solid stone and is adorned with an imposing pyramidal tower that rises to a height of 72 feet from the ground. There are many porches to the temple; the main one leading to the garbha griha is grand, and the right side of it there lies the big image of Nandi, the divine vehicle of Siva.

Here is another uniqueness, visitors, according to custom, have to announce their approach by pulling the ropes hanging from the bells, fixed to the ceiling. The courtyards are wide and there are several pavilions for parivaradevatas. In addition, there are eleven more grand shrines built for the most adorable gods, like Lakshminarayana, Savitri, Parvathi, Kali, Ganesh, Surya, Saraswati, Ramachandra, Vagula Devi, Annapura and Ananda Bhairava.

The main mandir, according to inscription was built by a devotee named Puran Mal and others by kings, priests and wealthy merchants. The sacred linga is comparatively very small — about only four inches in height and five inches in diameter and rises from the middle of a large slab of besalt. It bears the marks of hammer blows of Baiju. And also Ravananabrahma's heavy mace as evidenced by the uneven surface on the top. Visitors taking bath in the holy Sivaganga lake, measuring 600 x 900 feet, said to have been built by Mansingh, the great general of emperor Akbar, proceed to the garbha griha for worship. There is another well called Chandrakupa containing the
waters of all rivers in India, and the word goes round that leprosy is cured by drinking its water. Hence great rush near the well always.

It lies in Deogarh, a rail head and accessible by train on the Eastern Railways and by buses from cities like Patna, Gaya etc.

KHAJURAHO - KANDARIYA
MAHADEV MANDIR

This is a priceless gift, the Chandella princes of Rajaput clan presented to our holy land. Among the countless temples built around the huge lake called Ninora Tal, Yagini temple with wide court yards and spacious mandapas for gods is the first and it was built around 900 A.D. Kandariya Mahadev temple, the centre of eternal attraction lies adjacent to this. It was built by Vidhyadhara, the most powerful ruler in 1017 A.D. This largest of the extant Khajuraho temples typifies the style of architecture of the 10th century A.D. It has certain unique features that makes it stand apart as the best and foremost, both for veneration and approbation. This outstanding specimen of a full-fledged Khajuraho temple, embodies all the essential parts, like Ardhamandapa, Mahamandapa, Antarala, Garbhagriha, Pradakshhanapatha and pavilions for parivaraddevathas. All are distinctly designed and discreetly positioned. It is dedicated to Lord Mahadeva and a marble Sivalinga is installed in the garbha griha. Although it looks built for only one God, it is a pachayatana temple having provision for four principal icons with Maheswar in the centre. By quirk of fate, perhaps, the four corners assigned for four gods are now devoid of worshipful deities. Built on an elevated mound, with rising of spire upon ornate spire culminating in shikara with a kumbha type of ornate object atop, this shrine bears semblance to the mount Kailas, the eternal abode of Lord Siva. This star attraction is drawing lakhs of aesthetes and theists throughout the year. As Siva is the tutelary deity of Chand-ellas, it seems they emptied their inexhaustible treasure to making it a rare art piece of universal esteem. At its extreme north,
there is another one for Siva and is called Sambhu Marakateswara shrine, for the prime reason the linga is made of emerald. It is king Dhanga's gift to the theists. Another Siva temple, where a gigantic eight-foot-high Sivalinga is installed on a large Gauripatta, measuring twenty feet in diameter and four feet in height is worth-seeing. The enormity of its size together with the eminence of position is praise-worthy. Though there are some more Siva shrines, their pull is comparatively low.

It lies in Khajuraho, which is accessible by air from Delhi and train form Chatrapur station. From here all types of four wheelers are available.

71 GURUHA - MAHADEO MANDIR

The Bundekhand region ruled by valorous Chandellas claims countless shrines dedicated to almost all principal gods and goddess of Hindu pantheon in places like Khajuraho, Mahoba, Deogarh etc. Though not exercised great charm like Deograh, this less known Mahadev temple at Guruha enshrines a big Sivalinga and enjoyed great popularity in the past. It is built on the Naganath hill, a conspicuous land mark in the Markum area. It is an ancient temple containing all the Saivate gods and goddesses.

It lies 15 km off Guruha and 88 km to Jhansi enjoying bus facilities.

72 KALINJAR - NILAKANTA MAHADEV MANDIR

Among the many places of worship on the hill of Kalingar, the Nilakanta Mahadev merits first motion. In one of the caves of this big hill there lies the Nilakantha Mahadev temple. It contains a black image of Mahadev of about four feet in height and hence the name of Nilakanta Mahadev temple. Inscriptions furnish certain details of the kings who built and made endowments to this holy shrine.
It was built by Parmal Brahma, the last of Chandella rulers who ruled this region in twelfth century. Ardent devotees who worshipped were blessed by the lord and they made endowments lavishly. Inscriptions bear many details of such patrons and bhaktas. Vamanapurana embodies an exhaustive account of this Saivakshetra.

It is in Kalinjar town in Banda district of Madhya Pradesh. It was under the administration of Chandella kings and this temple lies in the celebrated fort of Bundelkhand.

**FAMOUS SIVA SHRINES IN ANDHRA PRADESH**

Aalayam is commonly and widely used for the place of worship in Andhra Pradesh. So, it is used for the following to give local colour.

**VIJAYANAGAR - PAMPAPATI AALAYAM**

The Vijayanagara empire is deservedly famous for its building of Aalayas and propagation of theism. Among the temples that received the emperors' munificent patronage, Pampapati Aalayam, popularly known as Virupaksha Aalayam merits reverent mention. Virupaksha is classed with the holy thirthas, which enjoins the observance of certain indispensable rituals on the orthodox visitors, like vupavasa, mundana — fasting, shaving etc. It has many legends and its sanctity and glory made it a great pilgrim centre. Many worth-seeing places, such as Rishyamuka Parvatha, Malayavana Parvatha associated with Ramayana characters, like Vali, Sugriva etc., are situated here. There are many Saivite gods — Parvati, Vinayaka, Subrahmanya installed in this temple, and the Sivalinga is known for bestowing boons on pious bhaktas liberally since inception.

The Pampapati Aalayam is a standing specimen of munificent royal patronage. A glance at it pays and elevates. So look!
The Temple Complex

Adjacent to the Jain Aalayas lies the imposing shrine dedicated to Lord Virupaksha, whose invisible presence gave an inexhaustible sustenance to the empire throughout. It has a massive prakara pierced by tall towers, the eastern eleven-storeyed majestic gopuram is the tallest and goes by the name of Galigopuram; for, it actually touches the Vayumandala, penetrating through the stately clouds. The sculptural marvels adorning the ceiling and walls detain both the laymen and connoisseurs alike for hours, if their aesthetic impulses are in sound condition. Here vastness and awe-inspiring hallowed splendour greet the eyes and feast the soul with sublimity. No wonder, its sanctity has been luring an unending influx of devotees since its inception in the dim past, prior even to the establishment of Vijayanagar empire to be precise, and so occupying the pride of place among the centuries-old temples of our Punya Bharat. The Sivalinga is quite imposing and its regality seems emerging from every inch of its architectural beauty. Ramaswamy Aalayam and Vijaya Vittalaswamy Aalayam lie on the holy bank in the north eastern direction. As each embodies Vijayanagara style of architecture and sculptural excellences, they enchant and bless the visitors munificently.

It lies near Hospet in Ballary district of Karnataka state enjoying road and railway facilities.

SURUTUPALLI - PALLIKONDA
SIVAPERUMAN AALAYAM

Rarity casts a spell and keeps the listeners and spectators spell-bound. Be it in any field, it wins applause and attracts one and all eternally. Even in the realm of religion, where miracles permeate, rarity and oddity enthral the viewers by their uncommon and bizzare features. One such rarity is found in the holy temple at Surutupalli near Nagalapuram on the main road to Madras. This Siva shrine contains the most rarest unique icon of Lord Siva in reclining posture, like the Anantha Padmanabhaswamy image at Trivandram. Nowhere in the globe, can one come
across such recumbent Siva in any temple built in ancient times, or modern days. It is a crest jewel to Saivism and even to architectural sculpture too. This black icon of Siva is very huge and exceedingly enticing by its exquisite craftsmanship and polish. The Sthalapurana narrates, that Siva after swallowing the halahalam that emerged from the churning of Kaheerasagaram experienced a sensation of reeling of head and preferred to lie down. Here Mother Parvathi sitting at His head is seen trying to hold the neck tight with her two hands, lest the conflagration — the aftermath of swallowing halahalam would burn the worlds inside; and if let out, the worlds outside be converted into ash dunes. The very concept and its masterly depiction by superb sculpture send thrills in the spines and unconsciously bend heads of the devotees in obeisance to that Lord of Lords. It surpasses the unsurpassable imaginative faculty and sculptural artistry. The garbha griha is housing nearly 18 other worshipful big size adorable deities. Lack of publicity and inadequate maintenance are crippling its growth and glory, else it should have exceeded the most venerated ancient shrines in luring devotees and filling the Aalaya hundis.

Next to this lies Mother's Sannidhi enshrining a four-foot-high granite icon and around the garbha griha there are many rare sculptures like Valmiki, Dampathi Dakshinamurti etc. To its left, in a separate minishrine there lies Valmikeswara linga, and just opposite there is installed another Sivalinga too. With many such unique features it is drawing the theists and art critics throughout the year. As everything is here enchanting, wearing an aura of oddity in divinity, visitation of this Aalayam — the only one of its kind in India affords an elevating experience and confers solace that remains in the hearts for ever. Its vast courtyards and beautifully sculptured icons are worthy of visitation and obeisance.

Surutupalli lies in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh and is accessible by bus from either Nagalapuram in Andhra Pradesh or Utkukota in Tamil Nadu on the main road to Madras from Puttur (Andhra Pradesh).
This lone cave Siva temple lying at the foot of Seven Hills near Alipiri - the extreme north end of Tirupathi town has a great spiritual significance. It stands chanting Sivanama perpetually, despite saturated and pervaded by the mystic ringing notes of ‘Govinda’, emanating round the clock from the devotion-soaked throats of bhaktas, visiting the holiest of holies. The enchanting two-foot-high black granite Sivalinga bedecked with diamond studded triple lines on the forehead wring veneration at the first sight and bends heads in veneration unknown to the bhaktas standing in front. That sight is a feast to the eyes and haunts the minds hours after seeing. The sight of the idol of Mother Parvathi in standing posture installed in a small shrine next also lifts the soul and fills the eyes with divinity.

The carving on the wall lying between these two inner chambers, depicting Kapila Maharshi sitting near the cow, milking itself over an ant-hill explains the glory of this kshetra. The Aalayam contains many icons of black stones in the adjacent hall with Navagrahas in the centre, facing the Shanmuga idol in a separate niche have a great attraction. Outside, under the neem tree and upon a high platform are set up the images of serpents - Nagadevathas that are receiving ritualistic worship with circumambulation. Next to them lie two mini-shrines housing huge Sivalingas and big size, Nandis infront. The first one is called Kotilingeswaralinga and the other Agasthiswaralinga. The lingas are moderate in dimensions, but their pull is decidedly great. Down below this rock-cut shrine lies the big Pushkarini fed by water, flowing down in torrents, from the sacred Saptagiris during the rainy season. There are two shrines at the portals - one shrine for Balaji facing east and another for Gopalakrishna. Recently another old shrine is renovated lying outside the entrance, and there are many modern architectural designs embossed on the rock with a charming garden in front. A little further away lies a moderate mandap housing a tall Anjaneya
figure engraved on a stone. A visit rewards and prayer refreshes the care-worn, dull, dreary existence.

It can be reached by town buses or Aalaya Darsana buses. In the heart of Tirupathi town there is another ancient Sivaalayam, but due to inadequate funds and publicity, Sivalilas are not recognised as they should be. Though it is old, it contains all the adorables deities such as Vinayaka, Mother Parvathi etc. duly installed and receiving agamic prayer services regularly.

ALAMPUR - PAPANASESWARA AALAYAM

It is a unique thirtha kahetra, although renowned for enshrining Navabrahmas in the nine Aalayas built in the North Indian style, like curvilinear towers etc., besides housing one of the Sakhipithas, it boasts of Sivaalayas and Vaishnavate Aalayas built on the banks of Vedavathi and Nadavathi, the tributaries of Tungabhadra. Among the Aalayas, the Papanaseswara Swamy Aalayam lies in the middle. Its architectural grandeur is comparatively less impressive, though the multi-pillared halls and huge mantaps enshrine many adorables deities. The sculptural pieces on the walls represent many episodes. One peculiarity observable here is the carving of Navagrahas on the ceiling. The Saptamatrakus shrine and a niche enshrining the Mahishasura Mardini deserve visiting for offering prayers. The Aalaya dedicated to Chennakesava swamy, Suryanarayana swamy, Narasimha swamy are in the vicinity of Navabrahma Aalayas and they are visit-worthy.

It lies just 20 km of Kurnool, the district head quarters town of the same name, commanding all facilities of conveyance.

VIJAYAWADA - MALLESWARASWAMY AALAYAM

In this holy pilgrim centré, as famous as Tripuri, there are many Sivaalayas, in addition to the most ancient
Malleswaraswamy Aalayam, lying just opposite Kanakadurga Aalayam on the Indrakiladri Parvatha, drenched eternally by the holy water of river Krishna. This temple is housing in addition to Saivate deities, beautiful Utsavamurtis kept in Addala Mantap lying adjacent to Navagrah mandir. The Sivalinga is about three feet in height and lifts the souls with its exquisite floral decoration and sparkling polish. It is said to have been installed by Agasthya and called it Jayasena. There are scores of legends woven round this potent murti; who demonstrated miracles numerous and emancipated the adorers under circumstances curious. Historical proof found in abundance reveals the splendour of the Lord and bends heads for soulful adoration. The Bhramaramba Malleswarasalayam said to have been built by Brahma goes by another name of old Sivaalaya and contains many adorable gods, like Vinayaka, Satyanarayana, Koteswara, Chandramouliwara, Balaji, Subrahmanyaswami, in addition to a big Sivalinga. Another shrine built at the foot of the Indrakila hills is called Vijayeswara Aalaya, believed to be the place, where Arjuna did penance and got Pasupata from Siva. The carvings on the walls illustrate this episode and it is said to have been built by Dharmaraja. It is because of this, Vijayawada got its present name. In Yanamalakuduru lying at the extreme end of municipal limits, there lies another temple built for Siva and is going by the name of Ramalingeswaraswamy. Belief is current that this hill temple was built by Parasuram, and there lived on this hill once, one thousand munis-hermits, and on account of that, it was popularly known Veyimunula kurudu, which later became Yenamalakuduru. In all these regular prayer services are carried on with unbounded fervour, but Durga Malleswaraswamy is luring a steady stream of pilgrims as it is the most ancient one connected it with Brahma, who adored the Sivalinga with Jasmine flowers and hence the name Malleswaraswamy.

All these Aalayas and about another half a dozen dedicated to Siva are in the city limits, accessible by the city bus service.
TALAKONA - SIVAALAYAM

Although situated amidst a thick forest, infested with wild animals, like cheetahs, jackals, tigers etc., and inaccessible due to inadequate means of transport facilities, this reputed Saivakshetra is luring lakhs of people, particularly on Mahasivaratri festival every year. Its tourist potential is its special attraction. The green verdure and awe-some spectacles of Nature’s bounteous beauty greet the eyes sooner than entering the forest zone, where Lord Mahadev is abiding in a modest sized Sivaalaya for over centuries, and conferring solace to the care-worn bhaktas. Although the entire zone shines resplendent and pulsates with devotional activities, only during periodical festivals, the attraction it has, is something unusual. For pure religionists, it is a spiritual haven and nature-lovers an open air museum. And above all, for film makers, it has turned out an El Dorado to shooting films involving wild animals or romantic adventures.

It lies near Piler in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh commanding all transport facilities.

KAILASAKONA - ESWARAALAYAM

This is an ancient valley shrine blessed with abundant picnic potential and devotional appeal, with a water fall of modest size that casts a spell on all-bhaktas and paryatakas always. Week-ends witness fascinating scenes throbbing with joyous life. The Aalaya is an ancient one housing a small Sivalinga in a cave, but the attraction for bath under a steady fall of water from above in the colourful surroundings lures people more. It is an ideal excursion spot for people living far and near. During the annual festival days, its gaiety coupled with piety soars higher.

It lies 10 Km off Puttur, the taluq head quarters town of the same name of Chittoor and is accessible by bus.
MADANAPALLI - SIVAALAYAM

Reputed as the cultural centre, and blessed with a seat of higher education - Besant Theosophical College, besides enjoying the honour of possessing the State's lone summer resort at close quarters, this premier taluq head quarters town of Chittoor district has etched its glorious name in the history of Andhra Pradesh. Its political eminence is also worthy of mention. There lie in this town many temples dedicated to several adorable deities, like Venkateswara, Anjaneya, Iswara etc. The ancient little holy temple enshrining a big Sivalinga lying on the western bank of river Bahuda is drawing a steady stream of devotees regularly. The recent renovation work breathed, as it were, a fresh lease of life into it and it has certainly revived the dropping theism. Several devotional activities are conducted regularly and they are restoring the glory to this old shrine gradually. Though there is another Sivaalaya in the midst of town itself, this one has a greater pull and the prayer services conducted too are worthy of mention. It has all the worshipful Saivate gods installed in befitting pavilions and minishrines.

This lies in Madanapalli, the taluq head quarters town of same name of Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh commanding all transport facilities.

YAGANTI - AGASTHEESWARA AALAYAM

Found amidst the Nature's colourful beauty, this Uma Maheswaraswamy Aalayam enshrines a self-manifested Sivalinga of great spiritual reputation. Next to Srisailam, this is visited by asthikas in large numbers throughout the year. A certain devotee by name Gnanananda had the vision of Lord Siva here, and in ecstatic rapture, it is said, he burst out "Yaganti, Neganti, Nenathmaganti which means — Seen, I have seen, and I have seen with soul Lord Siva". So this place became Yaganti later. It was visited by Pandavas and also gods at the invitation of
Maharshis like Agasthya, and many Pithadhipathis like Sankara and Virendra Brahma. The big size Nandi has many strange legends. This is Swayamvyakta and emerged when a big boulder was broken for construction work.

It lies in the Kurnool district from where regular bus service transports bhaktas to this place.

RAVIVALASA - ENDALA
MALLIKARJUNASWAMY AALAYAM

Strange to hear that a famous Sivaalaya is without top, without entrance, and the big linga enshrined in it has no doors at all too. It is a topless and doorless shrine, yet fulfilling the desires of the agricultural community of this region, when knocked at the door, as a matter of fact. Lord Paramasiva rushes to the rescue of His devotees to rain boons, if they fall at His feet with pure hearts soaked in Sivanama. It is a good old shrine and was visited by Sri Paramacharya of Kanchi Kamakoti pitha. As the presiding deity - Mallikarjuna, the local name for Lord Siva is exposed to hot Sun always, He goes by the name of Endala Mallikarjuna Swamy. It is a worth-visiting ancient shrine of great fame.

It lies 15km off Tekkali of Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh.

SIMHACHALAM -
LINGAKARAVARAHANARASIMHA
SWAMY AALAYAM

This ancient temple of Varahanarasimhaswamy that established an immortal name by etching its august legend on the pages of history was only Sivaalaya in the beginning. Even now the worship is made to Sivalinga, although it is called Varahanarasimha Swamy. This has many exciting legends. When it was under the administration of Gajapathi rulers, once the army of
Moghuls invaded and ransacked certain parts. When they attempted to enter the garbha griha by breaking the doors, then occurred an exiting Sivalila that made the iconoclasts take to heels, not due to the power of weapons, but by the mighty winged insects of no importance at all. Two austere priests, named Kurmanatha and Hariharadas, popular as born poets entered the garbha griha and locked it behind. Forthwith they sang in praise of Maheswar in fine lyrics and composed hundred poems in rhapsody. Their extemporaneous poetic devotion pleased the Lord most and sent millions and millions of honey bees that put to rout the religious bigots by harassing them with their sting. Unable to stand their infinite, ever increasing number and particularly poisonous bite, the army ran helter skelter and went back in shame and utter defeat.

Insignificant winged creatures scored a resounding victory over the ruthless bigots. Ah! How powerful is the ardent devotion! And how merciful is the Lord!! Tearful appeal never goes in vain, nor Lord Parameswar ever lets down His devotees.

Due to inexplicable reasons, that Saiva kshetra became a Vaishnavate Aalaya by the manoeuvres of some vested interests. Yet the self-same Sivalinga is worshipped in the name of Varahanarasimha Swamy and the Lord hastens to the rescue of true devotees at all times, even if He is called by another name. Rose by name smells sweet; isn’t it?

It lies 10 Km of Vishakapatnam, the district headquarters town of the same name and it commands transport facilities, like airport, railway junction, bus station in addition to seaport also.

RAJAHMUNDRI
UMAMAHESWARASWAMY AALAYAM

It is the principal Sivaalaya of the town, reputed as the self-same place, where the great sage Markandeya had installed the Sivalinga for relieving mankind from the misfortune of untimely death, as he was saved from the
Yamapasa, when hurled at by Yama himself. People, in grip of the fear of accidental death, or on crossing that period of imagined death - apamrtityuparihara worship this Siva with unbounded fervour. It is largely visited kshetra possessing many adorable deities as common to all Sivaalayas. Periodical festivals convert this into Bhukailas with several devotional activities consuming lakhs of rupees.

It lies on the bank of Goutami in the heart of the city and enjoys all facilities to reach it. There are many more Sivaalayas in and around this old city.

85 PALIVELA - KOPPULINGESWARSWAMY AALAYAM

This reputed Sivaalaya owes its existence to the sage Agasthya. The Sivalinga has an exotic legend. The story runs - a certain priest of this Aalaya was very famous as pious man for his high learning, but was notorious for his uncontrollable passion for flesh - he is a Vesyalola, and was worshipping the Lord regularly with garlands worn first by his lady love. The King suspected it, when a garland given to him was found containing a hair of that lady. The king insisted on truth, but the priest tried to hood-wink the King, saying that the Sivalinga has a braid and it was from that only the hair came. The King left desiring to see it on the next day before floral decoration to the Lord. The Priest wailed and laid his heart open to the Lord, soon after the exit of the King. Pleased with his devotional activities and sincere services, the Lord gave darshan to the King with braid, when came to test the priest on the next day. Gratified immensely, the King bestowed on the priest many valuaables, besides lands. They are enjoyed by his successors even today. Ah what a reward for devotion! The temple houses all the deities adorable and conduct pujas and festivals as laid down in agamas.

It lies 3 Km off Kothapet of West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, commanding all transport facilities.
The Siva kshetra is connected with many Puranic personages and their ardent devotion. It is here, according to legends, Indra, the Lord of heavens installed a great Sivalinga and offered Jalabhishekam to the Lord with the waters of one crore rivers. Hence the name Koteeswara linga. Another legend recounts that Moon-god had rid of his Gurupatnagama papa - the sin of intercourse with the preceptor's wife here by bathing in the Pushkarini and worshipping the icon of Somasekhar installed by him under the guidance of Brihaspathi. As he got back his chaya - lustre due to grace of Lord Siva, the deity is called Chaya Someswaraaswamy. A bath here during the Godavari Pushkar liberates any type of sinner and ensures a carefree pious existence later to the envy of his fellowmen.

It lies 12 Km off Draksharama in the West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh enjoying all transport facilities.

This ancient Aalaya built at the foot of hills has a long legend. It was lavishly endowed by several kings of many dynasties, like Chalukyas, Vijayanagara etc. The exquisite sculpture beautifying the wall panels and towers speaks volumes of royal patronage. The hills bear white road like patches across them for miles giving the impression of a serpent creeping in its usual zig-zag ways. Hence the name of Phanigiri for the hill. Moreover, the Aalaya tanks are fed by five water falls coming down perennially from high hills. They justify the name Panchadharala given. The bounteous colourful Nature around feasts the eyes and the Lord fills the souls munificently.

It lies 24 Km off Anakapalli of Vizag district, accessible by bus.
DWARAKA TIRUMALA - MALLIKARJUNA AALAYAM

This holy kshetra has imprinted its indelible name on the pages of history as a famous Hariharakshetra of eternal fascination, for enshrining both Siva and Vishnu Aalayas. The Siva Aalaya is located at the head, and the Venkateswara at the tail of the hill, which confirms the legendary description that the hill is the terrestrial form of Anantha - the divine couch of Srimannarayana. Of course, the Venkateswara Aalaya has out-shadowed the Siva shrine in appeal to the theists, yet discerning devotees visit and offer soulful prayers to this Lord Siva also. Regular worship and festivals are performed in accordance with the respective agamas of their own. Lying in the lap of colourful nature, they lure and detain them by their intrinsic divine worth and natural scenery.

This lies 12 Km off Bhimadole Railway Station on the Waltair - Vijayawada broad-guage line, and from Eluru town all types of vehicles are available.

LEPAKSHI - VIRABHADRESWARASWAMY AALAYAM

This historic august kshetra, possessing a majestic Nandi, the biggest of its kind in India, incidentally spotlights the high-handedness of the ruler Achyutaraya, as it bears the marks of the unjust punishment meted out to the master builder Virupanna, his trust-worthy treasurer for his overzealous devotion. It contains priceless sculptural pieces and wall paintings that drew global attention. Its epic evidence linked up with Jatayu's epidoses heightens its glory to unprecedented height. Virendraswamy Aalayam houses the most adorable deities like Papanaseswara, Rama, Durga and Virabhadra in one place, but in separate, grand shrines, but face to face, an oddity nowhere seen in India. Among the marvels, the Antariksha pillar, Saptaphani Nagendra, and the biggest Nandi are most credit-worthy plus points and merit indispensable visitation. Some of the
portions found incomplete seem making an appeal to the high heavens to send forth that devout builder to complete them for the profit of Bhaktakoti. Will he ever come down? Would heaven shower such munificence on theists? When the highest HE alone knows!

It lies 12 km off Hindupur, one of the famous towns of commercial importance in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh and accessible by bus always.

AYINAVOLU - MAILARDEVA AALAYAM

This Aalaya goes by another name of Mallikarjunaswamy Aalayam. It was built by King Kakati Rudradev and acquired immense fame due to munificent royal patronage, and adoration. The Sivalinga is white in colour and installed on a broad panavattam. Just over and above the Linga, there is installed a six-foot high icon of Mailardeva flanked by His consorts Baliya Medalamma and Gollaketamma. The icon reveals the roudra - fierce aspect of Siva and holds in His four hands the potent weapons, like Trisula, Khadga, Dhamaru and Padma. A visit-worthy Aalaya! And a merit-conferring Lord!! It houses all the adorable Saivate gods in appropriate minishrines.

It lies at a distance of 14 km to Warangal, the district head quarters town of the same name in Andhra Pradesh.

ACHANTA - RAMALINGESWARASWAMY AALAYAM

This kshetra was called Marthandapuram in the past. The Ramalingeswaraswamy Aalayam is a famous shrine like the Venugopalswamy Aalayam here, attracting huge crowds. The belief is current that the archamurti is Swayambhu - self-manifested linga, and popular as Achanteswaraswamy. This Aalaya also enshrines, as many as six lingas like Lakshmaneswara linga, Someswaralinga, Markandeyalinga,
Bhimalinga, Skandalinga and Indralinga. And they are named after the deities who installed them, according to one version. Several other deities also are receiving pujas with great ardour.

It lies in Achanta, 20 km off Palakollu of West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

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UMAMAHESWARAM -
UMAMAHESWARA AALAYAM

This is called the northern portal of Srisailam, and the premier Saiva kshetra enshrining one of the twelve jyotirlingas according to the priest. It is a hill temple, built by Kalyana Chalukyas in the seventh century itself.

The Sthalapurana says that Mother Parvathi did penance here, propitiating Lord Siva and in the end married Him in accordance with her wish in the presence of Saptamaharshis. The oddity of the hill is — it is crescent shaped and contains Aalayas both upon it and at its foot. This Aalaya is described as Guptamaheswaram in literary treatises.

It lies in the town of Uma Maheswaram of Achchampet taluk of Mahabubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh.

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KADALI - KAPOTESWARAALAYAM

The local belief current in this parts is, that a certain great sage worshipped the Sivalinga here in the form of Kapota - dove. Hence the name Kapoteswaraalayam for the temple. The Sivalinga has two doves over the top. A strange feature ! An example of Sivalila ! There is a tank called Kapotagundam and it is believed that two doves sacrificed their lives for the benefit of a hunter. One serpent used to come from the tank and was worshipping the Lord with great regularity. And from that time, the aalaya authorities introduced on the auspicious Subrahmanya
Shasti, a special prayer service, which is luring huge crowds every year.

It lies at a distance of 5 km of Rajolu in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

KUDALI - SANGAMESWARA AALAYAM

The famous Aalaya is at the confluence of Tungabhadra and Krishna rivers. It was built by Chalukyas and it resembles the renowned Alampur Navabrahmaalayas in architectural style. The walls are adorned with the beautiful carvings of Nataraja, Ardhanareeswara, Andhakasura samharamurti. They are its plus points. Regular prayers in accordance with Saivagamas are offered. And the periodical festivals too with great devotional ardour.

It lies at 15 km distance of Alampur in the Mahabubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh.

KOMARAVELU - MALLIKARJUNAALAYAM

The special feature of this Sivaalaya lies in Lord Siva's revealing in His Chaturbhuja form, holding in hands trisula, sword, nagastra and fire-pot, flanked by Golla Ketamma and Balija Medadadevi, the local names for his consorts - Parvathi and Ganga. The beautiful granite image of Siva in sitting posture is about four feet in height and sculptured masterly. This Siva is popular as Komaravelu Mallanna.

This lies 30 km off Janagav railway station of Warangal district of Andhra Pradesh.

KOLANUPAKA - VISWESWARAALAYAM

This renowned kshetra is recorded in the sthalapuranas as Bimbavathipura, Somasekharapura,
Vyakhyanagara etc. This is located near a holy well called Kasibugga. So this water is called aparā Gangajala and the Sivalinga, aparā Kasi Visweawara linga. Hence this sacred place is given the name of Dakshinakasi. An account of numerous Kolanus - ponds found in abundance here, it is called Kolanupaka. The linga is self-manifested and called Kotilinga. It is about four and a half feet in height, and four feet in circumference. It is adorned with thousand small similar lingas carved around it forming, as it were, a chain around. This appeared according to the priests and puranas as gold linga in Kritayuga, silver one is Treta yuga, copper linga in Dwapara yuga and granite in Kaliyuga. This was built by King Kumara Someswara of Kalyani Chalukya dynasty.

It lies at Kolanupaka, 25 km off Bhuvanagiri in the Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh.

**MUKTEESWARAM - MUKTIRAMESWARAALAYAM**

This is an ancient Aalaya with an exalted legend. The Sthalapurana embodies the account that Sri Rama installed the Sivalinga here, when he travelled back to Ayodhya after Ravana samhara. When he came to this region, darkness descended, and then he decided to install a Sivalinga here feeling that the Brahmahatya sin was following him like shadow. Forthwith, he sent Hanuman to bring Linga from Kasi. The rest of the story resembles that which took place at Rameswaram. As this place confers mukti, it is called Muktirameswaram. According to another legend, there was one woman by name Sramani doing penance at the time of Sri Rama’s descent on this land. She was rid of her curse with a mere look of Srirama in a single kshana at it. So this holy place was called kshana Mukteeswaraalayam. Lord Siva gave darsan to Srirama and blessed him, and later coalesced into the linga. The temple houses all the adorable deities, installed in minishrines suitable to their stature and eminence.
This linga bears the finger prints of Sri Rama on the top.

This lies on the bank of Penna river near Proddutur forming an integral part of the town of Cuddappah district of Andhra Pradesh.

MUKHALINGAM - MUKHALINGESWARA AALAYAM

This Mukhalinga kshetra claims of three reputed Aalayams - Madhukeswaraalayam, Bhumeswaraalayam and Someswaraalayam, all built in one place by the kings of Ganga dynasty, who ruled from this flourishing city then called, Kalinga Nagar. Its fame spread then to the four corners and was called, Vaijayanti Kshetra or Dakshina Kasi. This linga has been in existence in the four yugas according to local version and is variously called, such as Jayanteeswara in the Krita yuga, Gokarneeswara in the Treta, Madhukeswara in the Dwapara and Mukhalingeeswara in the Kali yuga. There are Ashtadikpalaka lingas in the eight corners of the main Aalaya. The Sivalinga is white in colour, unlike the black granite ones found in almost all places. According to legend, Lord Siva came out of a - Ippachattu called Madhukaa in Sanskrit to save a devotee from a Sabara king and to lift Gandharvas from a curse. Hence He is called Madhukeswara. The goddess worshipped here is called Varahi, and is one among the Saptamatrikas. She has a separate shrine, imposing in appearance and sculptural adornments. She resembles Durga.

Bhumeswara aalayam is just a hundred yards away from Madhukeswara aalayam. And Someswara aalayam is in close proximity to it. The Sivalingas in these two are made of black granite. Their finish and polish are of high order displaying the excellent craftsmanship of the master sculptor. The royalty's lavish patronage and high refinement are peeping at every frame.

It lies at a distance of 25 km to Parlakimidi of Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh.
Mogili - Mogileeswaraalayam

This is a reputed Saiva kshetra, where the Sivalinga according to local version was found amidst mogili flowers in the dim past. Hence the appropriate name. There is a small hillock adjacent to it, called Devarakonda, where lies a spring dug by Maheswar with His Trisul, according to sthalapurana. So it is aptly called Trisulathirtha. As the Sivaalaya is built on its bank near the Mogili bushes, the Aalaya is called Mogileeswaraalayam. An oddity that is found here is, the perennial flow of water from the mouth of Nandi image enshrined in a niche lying next to the Aalaya. It was built in 120 B.C. according to inscriptions. The Sivalinga is big and grand.

It lies in the village of Mogili, in the Bangarupalem taluq of Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh.

Ramaghattalu - Sivaalayam

This is one of the Aalayas built by Sri Rama on his way to Ayodhya after Ravana's death. There are some footprints on a flat broad stone supposed to be of Sri Rama's foot prints. The Sivalinga is big and grand. And the temple contains all the worshipful gods, like Vinayaka, Subrahmanyam, Nandi in modest niches.

It lies near Kahanamukti Rameswaraalayam of East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

Warangal - The Thousand Pillared Aalayam

This famous Aalaya has carved out an unenviable place in the Aalaya history of Bharat, and is one of the nine famous Aalayas of Warangal district of Andhra Pradesh. It is in the heart of town. This is an integral part of the most reputed Thousand pillared Aalaya built by the renowned Kakati Rudra Deva in 1184 A.D. It is built in
the shape of star — a superb architectural feat. The artistry of the sculptors is of high order, and won the applause of many world renowned art — critics. The Aalaya is dedicated to three deities — Siva, Brahma and Surya, and each has a separate splendid shrine, but now in ruins. Yet, the Sivaalayam alone is standing unaffected by the ravages of time. Regular worship is carried on and it is the most visit-worthy Sivaalaya throbbing with Siva mahima of the town.

It lies in the town of Warangal, the district head quarters town of the same name in Andhra Pradesh, commanding rail and road facilities.

VEMULAWADA -
SRIJARAJARAJESWARA AALAYAM

Vemulavada was the capital of Chalukyas, and being religious to the core, they built several Aalayas both in and out of the capital. In Vemulavada itself there are more than a dozen of highly reputed Aalayas, for all gods and goddesses, like Aalayas for Rajarajeswari, Nageswar, Bhimeswar, Kedareswar, Venugopal, Nrisimha, Seethala, Kanakadurga, Mahalakshmi etc. The pride of place is given to Rajarajeswaraalayam and it was a great centre of Saivism in the past. And present too.

This Aalayam is fairly a big one, and famous for its architectural sculpture due to abundant royal patronage it enjoyed. On account of the existence of a holy tank called Dharmagundam, it gained great reputation. According to legend, Narendra, the grand son of Arjuna killed a hermit by mistake during his hunting expedition. The sin of Brahmahatya tortured him sorely. He could not rid of it, despite visiting thitha kshetras and performing several ritualistic worship as enjoined by sastras. But, once by chance, he visited this Aalaya and drank a handful of water thrice. And lo ! the mental anguish vanished like the mist before the rising Sun. Moreover, he was informed in his dream by Lord Siva Himself that He had been lying in the form of linga under water. He was further
told to take it out and install in a fitting shrine for regular public worship. He carried out the divine injunction forthwith and named the linga as Rajarajeswaraswamy linga. Later the tank acquired unprecedented fame, for, it absolved the mahapapas of celestials and sages too; Devendra was rid of the sin of killing Vritasura etc. Very many legends were woven round it eulogising the glory of Rajarajeswar and the holy tank. It is said that one gets emancipated by mere mentioning it even. It is a premier Saiva kshetra, although there are many Aalayas for other celestial dignitaries here. There are as many as twenty two Sivalingas, and each has a fascinating legend of its own. The Sivalinga installed in Bhimeswaraalayam is highly powerful and it demonstrated many Sivalilas. The other temples lure the bhaktas equally well. Though ancient, they are maintained properly. Hence the attraction perennial.

It lies in the little town of Vemulavada at a distance of 25 km to Karimnagar, the district head quarters town of the same name in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

MAHANANDI - MAHANANDISWARAALAYAM

This reputed Saiva kshetra claims several special features and enjoys a steady influx of devotees throughout the year. It was built by Chalukya kings, and munificently endowed by Vijayanagara dynasty also. Built by Rasasiddhi, a great sculptor, it has all the principal parts like towers, mini-shrines, courtyards, prakaras etc. built superbly at it.

Among the special features worthy of mention is — the invisible water spring that lies under the Sivalinga. The water flowing through the mouth of a big size image of Nandi, the divine vehicle, installed outside of garbha griha falls into a square shaped tank. Its perennial flow is irrigating hundreds of acres of nearby paddy fields. Secondly the Sivalinga bears the hoof-prints of a cow. It is irregularly shaped, yet is demonstrating numerous Sivalilas since inception. On account of that huge Nandi, and the unending
flow of crystal clear water, it is called Mahanandi. The pilgrims of Srisailam invariably visit this kshetra and worship the Lord Siva with exceptional fervour. And there is a belief current that, he who visits all the nine Nandi kshetras, like Padmanandi, Naganandi, Vinayakanandi, Garudanandi, Brahmanandi, Suryanandi, Vishnunandi, Somanandi, Sivanandi, in a day from dawn to dusk, gets Sivasayuja mukti. Many devout bhaktas are visiting them with great fervour, since all these nine are located in a radius of 15 km.

It lies at a distance of 16 km to Nandyala, one of the premier towns of Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh.

MANTHINI - GOUTAMESWARAALAYAM

This little town of Manthini was a famous Saiva kshetra in the past, and called Mantrapuram then. There are many Aalayas dedicated to Siva, Saraswati, Durga, Narasimha etc. Among them, Omkareswaraalayam, Siddheswaraalayam, Goutameswaraalayam, Sri Lakshmi Narasimhaalayam, Durgaalayam, Saraswataialayam are famous. There is another Aalayam here on a high mound resembling an island in the centre of Godavari, enshrining Ekadasarudras on the same Panavattam - base of the linga, and also eleven Nandis in one big Nandi image. A grand sculptural feat ! A grander gift to Saivism !! And the grandest sport of Lord Maheswar !!! It houses like any Sivaalayam the Saivite dignitaries in beautiful mini-shrines.

It lies in Manthini town, at a distance of 60 km to Karimnagar, the head quarters town of the same name in Andhra Pradesh.

MANDAPAKA - SOMESWARA AALAYAM

This holy Saiva kshetra went by the name of Mandavya kshetra due to Mandavya maharshi’s penance
and his obtaining Daiva Sakhatkar. There are two reputed Aalayas dedicated to Sri Kesavaswamy and Someeswaraswamy. This Kesavaswamy Aalayaam is among the Pancha Kesava kshetras, the others being situated at Ryali, Tanuku, Duvva, Katalaparru. It is a well-built and commendably maintained shrine drawing a steady stream of asthikas.

The Someeswaraalayam is located in the heart of this little town and faces east. The Sivalinga is made of black granite and lures the devotees with its size and powers of emancipation of true bhaktas.

This famous Harihara kshetra lies in Mandapaka the Tanuku taluq of West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

BIKKAVOLU - GOWLINGESWARAALAYAM

The little town was once the capital of Chalukya Gunaga Vijayaditya and was well-known by his honorific title of Birudanka Bhima. His capital was then named after him and became popular as Bhimanaprolu, which in course of time became Bikkavolu. There are three Aalayas facing east and are called Golingeswaraalaya, Rajarajeswaraalaya and Chandrasekaraalaya - all dedicated to Siva only, though bearing different names.

Of the three, Golingeswaraalayam is the biggest and grandest too on account of its sculptural adornments. They have Sivalingas as the main worshipful deities. The Sivalinga installed in Golingeswaraalaya made of black granite is quite alluring by its height and polish. The Aalaya also enshrines Subrahmanya icon in one of its niches and goes by the name of Subbarayudu. There are ant-hills with serpents, and they are also receiving regular worship. To get relief from ear-ache and get Santanaprapti, adorers throng this Aalaya throughout the year and offer prayers for periods lasting ten to forty days. On account of perceptible relief one gets - a tangible proof the Lord’s mercy its importance is on the ascendency to the amazement test-tube scientists.
This lies at a distance of 12 km to Ramachandrapuram of East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

POLASA - POULASTEESWARA AALAYAM

The modern Polasa town was called Poulasteeswarapuram in the past. It was also called Rishipallai, due to dwelling of hermits in large numbers. Once a rare Sivalinga was found here and a suitable Aalaya was built later with the donations of the Philanthropic public. There are many Aalayas built for Venugopalaswamy, Jogeswaraswamy, Pochamma, Ekaviradevi, Anjaneya and the like, but Poulasteeswaraswamy Aalayam receives top priority in luring bhaktas and carrying on devotional activities.

The Sivalinga worshipped here attracts all classes of people since its emergence. Saivate gods are installed in well built niches and are receiving regular prayers.

This lies in the little town of Polasa, about 6 km to Jagaityala town in the Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh.

PENUKONDA - SIVAALAYAM

This was the second capital to the Vijayanagara kings and was called as Ghanagiri or Ghanadri. There was two famous Aalayas - Sri Ramaalayam and Sivaalayam in the big fort, then called Gaganamahal Fort. Both are in ruins now, eventhough the royal dynasty patronised and spent lavishly then. Age has withered its external splendour, but its internal divinity is still exercising hold on the theists.

The Sivaalaya contains a big size Sivalinga and just opposite it lies a huge Nandi image. It is built in Vesara style with a Visvamana on the garbha griha and other parts as commonly found in Sivaalayas.
It lies in Penugonda, the taluq head quarters town of the same name in the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh.

**PUSHPAGIRI - SANTANA MALLESWARASWAMY AALAYAM**

This Pushpagiri was and is the renowned Advaita Mata Pita in Andhra Pradesh, occupying a coveted place both in legends and history. This is the North-western gate of Srisailam, and went by the name of Parankusam. Its spiritual background is quite fantastic and the popularity it commands is infinitely great. According to legend, Garutmanta, the vehicle of Sri Mahavishnu was constrained to fight against Devendra, when carrying a pot of nectar to release his mother from the slavery. Then a drop of nectar fell by chance into a tank here. Due to unpleasant odour the water discharged later, the place incurred the wrath of Brahma once. Narada appeared on the scene to avert danger to Garutmanta and requested Hanuma to cover the pond with a big mountain. Hanuman did. What a surprise, it started floating like a flower when he threw it. Vishnu and Eswara pressed it with one foot each on its two sides. As the mountain floated like flower; it was called Pushpagiri. This place later attained immense spiritual power due to many Sivalilas occurred here, and it went by the name of Dhakshina Kasi.

There are as many as eight famous Aalayas here dedicated to Vishnu and Siva. The Saivite Aalayas have different names and enshrine the lingas of Kasi Viswanatha, Vaidyanatha, Trikoteswara, Indranatheswara, Kamalasambhaveswara, Santana Malleswara and Uma Maheswara. They are adorned with exquisite sculptural pieces. Regular worship according to Saivagasams is performed. Moreover, the holy Srichakra worshipped here was installed by Adi Sankara, according to the priests.

This kshetra is also called Panchanandi kshetra due to the joining of five rivers here, such as Papaghni, Kumudvati, Valkula and Mandavi into Penna. If one ascends
the hill everyday after circumambulating the Aalayas for three weeks, he gets freed from punarjanma, says the Sthalanga. The Chennakesavaswamy prasad given in the Aalaya of the same name is so sacrosanct that bachelors get married, and barren women Santana as sure as the Sun rises in the east, extol the locals loudly, rather proudly. Belief works, relief lifts.

It lies 16 km off Cuddapah, the district head quarters town of Andhra Pradesh.

PALAMPET - RAMALINGESWARA SWAMY AALAYAM

The world renowned Ramappa Aalaya is dedicated to Ramalingeswaraswamy, but not to Sri Rama, as the same Ramappa Aalaya goes. This Sivaalaya was named only after Ramappa, the immortal sculptor. It is a standing pecimen of the Deccan architectural pattern of medievalimes. It was built by King Recharla Rudra of Kakatiya dynasty in 1273 A.D., and is common with the Hanumakonda Thousand pillared Aalaya in sculptural patterns and architectural models. Its plinth resembling a star rises above the ground to a height of seven feet nearly. The profusion of Madanika figures and superb craftsmanship displayed on the inner and outer walls of the shrine affords a grand feast to the eyes. Mural carvings depict dancing poses of different kinds along with important scenes from Mahabharatha. In the garba griha, the three-foot-high Sivalinga installed on a 18-foot high, Panavatta arrests the attention of the visitor and enthrals him instantly. The metal image of Nagendra with its outspread hood heightens the grandeur of Sivalinga and detains for long. Many adorable deities adorn the beautiful niches in and out of the main Aalaya and other subsidiary ones built in its close proximity.

It is located in Palampet at a distance of 90 km to Warangal, the head quarters town of the same name in Andhra Pradesh.
PAMIDI - BHOGESWARA AALAYAM

This Aalaya was first built by Lord Parasuram at the foot of the hill called Simhagiri and installed the icons of Gouri and Shankar along with Kesava Swami. Lured by the sanctity of the place, Agasthya, Rishyasringa and Simhagiri Bhat performed penance and got their desires fulfilled by the grace of Lord Siva. As the story goes, one cowherd once observed one of his cows standing over an ant-hill and allowing its milk flow down into it. When he was about to beat it with his axe, there came a voice in ringing tones disuading him to leave it unharmed, and also inform his master to build an Aalaya for Lord Bhogeswaraswamy; for, He was there dwelling in it for long. The same night the master too had the same dream.

On the next day when the master removed the ant-hill, he found a big size Sivalinga encircled by a serpent on a huge Panavatta. Deeming it auspicious, he built the Aalaya, and also another one for Mother Parvathi. Again he was instructed in his dream by Adisesha to build a small hamlet around, and name it Seshagrandhipuram. He implemented the divine injunction implicitly.

The Sivalinga is about five feet in height and it is self-manifested. As the serpent entwined the Sivalinga, it was appropriately called Bhogeswaralinga. The Aalaya is adorned with beautiful sculptural representations of all gods, like Nandi, Navagrahas, Vinayaka etc. With the passage of time it attained great eminence as a great Saiva kashetra.

It lies in Pamidi, at a distance of 15 km to Gutti in the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh.

PATTISAM - VEERABHADRESWARA SWAMY AALAYAM

This is one of the Panchamahasiva kashetras of our Punya Bharat attracting Saivites throughout the year; the others being Kedarnath, Kasi, Srisailam and Kalahasti. Sri Mahavishnu with his consorts Bhudevi and Niladevi is
abiding in another Aalaya called Bhavanarayanasiwamy Aalayam.

The Sivalinga is unusually a big one, measuring about eight feet from ground and six feet from over panavatta, and three feet in circumference. It is excellently chealled and feast the eyes with its hugeness and polish. In this same place, there is another Aalaya with the images of Anisiri and Punisri. The belief is current that barren women beget children, if they touch the thumb of the left foot of Anisri and maidens attain puberty, if they do likewise to the other image incase they are denied due to some bodily defect - a sin of the past life. This is luring the unfortunate victims throughout the year.

It lies near Polavaram, the taluq head quarters of the same name of West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

NIDUDAVOLU - GOLINGESWARASWAMY AALAYAM

This place was called Niravgadyapuram after the title Niravadya of the Prince Vijayaditya of the Western Chalukyas. He built this Aalaya after a rare incident that drew the attention of the people of this region with awe and admiration. A cowherd once observed a cow milking voluntarily over a thick bush. Curiosity roused him to remove the overgrown creepers. To his surprise, he found a big size Sivalinga. When reported, theists came forward to build an Aalaya. The king accomplished their desires diverting huge sums of money. The Aalaya is a big one with many parivara devathas along with Rajarajeswari Devi, the consort of Lord Siva. When excavations were carried out intensively in 1943, many idols, such as Nandi and a big Sivalinga were found. And they are installed in befitting mini shrines.

This lies at Nidadavolu at 24 km off Kovvuru of West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.
TONDAVADA - AGASTHEESWARAALAYAM

This sacred shrine lies at the confluence of three rivers Swarnamukhi, Bhima and Kalyani. As the Sivalinga was installed by Agasthya Mahamuni, it is called Agastheeswara linga. This temple faces east and has almost all parivaradevathas installed in well—built niches like Ganesh, Subrahmanya etc. The Dwarapalakas at the entrance are beautifully sculptured and are heightening the grandeur of the hall. It has three entrances and a grand compound wall. Inside the second prakara, there is a separate shrine for Mother Parvati called here by the name of Vallimata. There is a tank outside the compound for the convenience of visiting pilgrims. The nearby village was named Tondavada by the kings of Chandragiri, as it was the place used as a rest house for visitors and keeping elephants also.

Just opposite the Aalaya and in the middle of the river there is built a mantap in which installed the beautiful statues of Balaji, Ayyappa, Ganapati, etc. They are visit-worthy. And there is a small shrine too for Sri Rama, Sita, Lakshman and Anjaneya near the tank and it is built in recent times.

It lies at about 12 km to Tirupati, the world renowned Vaishnava kshetra in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh.

KONDAPEKA - SIVAALAYAM

This place claims two Aalayas — one for Siva and another for Sri Rama. The huge Sivalinga called Mahalinga found here, is supposed to have been brought from Kasi itself. But unfortunately, it was neither installed, nor has an Aalaya built matching its sa cosranct history. It is believed that there are fourteen more Sivalingas awaiting regular worship, but they could not. That is a mystery which the mysterious Mahadeva alone knows. In the other Aalayas also there are Sivalingas receiving regular worship.
The queerness deserving mention is, that the Ramaalaya enshrines one big Sivalinga and prayers are offered to it according to Saivagamas, where as in Ramaalaya, normally Vaishnava sampradaya is followed. Mysterious are the sports of the Gods! Imagination courts failure and explanation bending its head expresses its inability!!

This lies in the village of Kondapaka at 12 km off Siddhipet of Medak district of Andhra pradesh.

116 TADIKALAPUDI - GANGESWARAALAYAM

It is an ancient Aalaya with a fascinating tale. It was originally built by Bhishma, the redoubtable Kuru Pitamaha of unparalleled valour and eminence. The Sivalinga called Gangeswara Sivalinga is Swayambhu.

It is believed that, once an ardent devotee was advised by Lord Siva to build an Aalaya for him in that sacred place itself, and if he neglected His bidding, He would grow to unusual height. Fearing evil consequence of disobedience, the people built forthwith an Aalaya and drove a nail on the top of Sivalinga to stop further growth. Siva kept up His word and the devotees were blessed for their devotion. There is another Aalaya for Sri Rama here and it is equally famous.

This lies in Tadikalapudi village at a distance of 20 km to Eluru in the West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

117 CHEJERLA - KAPOTEESWARA AALAYAM

This kshetra has a long legend, and great history. According to it, king Mandhata of Kashmir had an illustrious son called Sibi, who was blessed with two noble brothers called Meghadambara and Jeemuthavahana. The elder, when went on pilgrimage, found at a holy hill many Maharshis doing penance and living a life of beatitude. Drawn by it, he began penance and at the end left for his heavenly abode. The Maharshis burnt his body and kept the ashes in the form of a linga. Jeemuthavahana came in search of his brother and learning about the demise, he followed suit lured by the bliss of emancipation.
Then came Sibi himself and seeing the lingakaras of his brothers, he decided to perform hundred yagnas to go to heaven with his mortal body.

When the last yagna one was getting performed, gods wanted to put him to test. Taking the form of hunter Siva, arming himself with an arrow, Brahma formed as planned, chased Vishnu who changed Himself into a dove for enacting a mock drama. The dove sought Sibi's protection from the hunter. The hunter rushing in, demanded his prey to be given at once. Having assured protection, he did not give the dove, but was ready to give anything he demanded. Thereupon, the hunter demanded Sibi's flesh equal to the weight of the dove. Sibi gladly accepted the condition. Forthwith, he began cutting from his body flesh equal to the weight of dove. Although all parts of his body were cut and placed in the pan, it did not rise a little higher ever. He then cut his head and put it in the pan. The Trio then revealed their identities and asked him to name his desire to be granted at once. He wished for the transformation of his body along with those of his brothers into lingas for emancipation. It was granted unanimously. Then a grand temple was built on the spot of the body of Sibi and that is worshipped now as Kapoteeswaraalayam even today.

The archamurthi is Sivalinga and it has two big holes on the top. Even today bad odour of flesh and blood emanates after Abhisheka. Further the Abhishek jala goes into an unknown underground pit. Above all the Kapotalinga resembles the headless body of a human. Can God's ways are so easy to comprehend? Would not with such sports alone He keeps the Bhaktakoti bound to Dharma?

There are many niches enshrining several deities, and this Aalaya is built with a harmonious blend of Nagara, Vesara and Dravida styles of architecture. Another colourful feather! Archeologists unanimously declared that it is the first stone - built — Aalaya of the entire Bharat.

This lies in Chajerla town, 25 km off Narasaraopet in the Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh.
GHANTASALA - JALADHEESWARA AALAYAM

It is here Lord Siva is abiding with Parvathi on a raised dias and is called Jaladheeswaraswamy. Nowhere in India Siva's icon is worshipped with the name of Jaladheeswara. It is one of the famous Saiva Kshetra of Andhra Pradesh and the Vimana on the garbha griha bears a striking resemblance to that of Brihadeeswaraalayam of Tanjore. The Aalaya contains many more beautiful icons of Vugra Narasimba, Kalabhairava, Saraswati etc. The icon of Saraswathi resembles Mohejadiara image, and it is a unique one in many respects. The Aalaya thus claims many uniques, making it stand apart form other Sivaalayas. It houses all the worshipful deities in appropriate shrines.

It lies in the town of Ghantasala of Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh.

GUDIMALLAM — PARASURAMESWARAAALAYAM

Say Sivaalayam, there flashes them across your mind a Sivalinga, the object of adoration. Its size may vary and colour too differ, but lingakara remains constant. Rarely the icons of Lord Siva are installed, but to see him in the form of male genital is unique. It conception sends thrills and the sight springs surprises. This is what one experiences in the temple at Gudimallam, near Tirupati.

The temple called Parasurameswaraalayam is built on the banks of Suvaranamukhi river. There is a fascinating tale about this place. It runs-once there was a devotee by name Parasurameswara, who was worshipping Lord Siva regularly with expectional ardour using flowers grown in his tank nearby. The flowers were odd in shape and colours. And grand to look at. The Lord was pleased and conferred bliss on him. Seeing this unseen, a demon one day ventured to pluck all the flowers and offered to Siva. Finding the transgression grievous, the pious Sivabhaakta entered into a fierce boxing bout with the demon. When the vanquished demon was about to be crushed, Lord Siva appeared and blessed the both with their desire of Sayujyamukti - merging in Him.

The temple has many oddities and some of which
are contradictory to traditional building pattern. The first thing that greets, rather surprise us when entered, is the five-foot-high black granite Sivalinga resembling the erected male genital organ. Besides, the uniqueness of the image of Siva sculptured in the fore of the linga, sitting on the shoulders of a demon with deer in one hand, water pot in another, gandragoddal on the shoulder, and ears adorned with big rings and hands with wrist bands causes additional surprise. This rare representation of Siva shares the characteristic features of Mangoliid, and such icons with striking male features and rare. Scholars and researchers studying this silpakanda from several angles praised vociferously its many splendid beauty and multi-faceted novelty. It is a visit—worthy shrine of immense spiritual eminence.

It lies at a distance of 18 km from Tirupati.

(120) DUVVA - NAGESWARASWAMY AALAYAM

This place is associated with the famous Maharshi Durvas and was called Durvasapuram in the past. Among the four temples dedicated to Venugopalaswamy, Seetharamaswamy, Kesavaswamy and Nageswaraswamy the last one is deemed to have been built in the Dwapara yuga. Besides the Sivalinga, there lies the granite icon of Mother Parvathi called here as Parvathavardhini, and she reveals herself like a young girl aged five only. It is its speciality and is drawing attention and veneration by devotees.

It lies 6 km off Tanaku town of West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh and can be reached by bus and train.

(121) YOGIMALLAVARAM - PARASARESWARA AALAYAM

It is an ancient temple said to have been built by Chola kings. It contains all the parts of a Vesara type of temple with garbha griha, antarala and vimana on the sanctum. Adorable deities like Ganapathi, Dakshina murthi, Chandi, Kumaraswamy saptamatrikas are installed in beautiful niches along with the image of Brahma also. A speciality.
It lies on the way to Tiruchanur, the reputed pilgrim centre where Mother Padmavathi is adored. Accessible by bus from Tirupathi.

**TADIPATRI - BUGGA RAMALINGESWARASWAMY AALAYAM**

Lying on the bank of Pinakini river, this ancient Sivaalayam has many uniques to its credit. Two plus points gave it the present name — one, there is a spring underneath the Sivalinga, and as such, it goes by the name of Bugga; and another, it was built by Ramalinga Naidu, a ruler of great fame, so the temple bears the name of Bugga Ramalingeswaraswamy, indicating there by its uniqueness and justifies its name too. Another opinion is that, it was built with deep black stone looking like coal; so it was named Boggu Ramalingesawara Aalayam which later came to be known as Bugga Ramalingeswaraswamy temple. Whatever be the origin, it is a big temple with all the parts, built on a grand scale making provision for all the adorale deities, like Mother Parvathi, Vinayaka etc. in addition to a shrine for Sri Rama. And on account of the abundant growth of Palmyrah trees here, it was called Tativanam in the past. Beautiful carvings depicting Sivalilas are adorning the walls.

It lies 55 km off Guntakal, a famous railway junction in the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh.

**GUDLUR - NILAKANTESWARASWAMY AALAYAM**

This sacred Siva kshetra has given birth to Errana, one of the great poets, who translated Vyasa's Mahabharata into Telugu. This good old temple built during the reign of Maurya Chandragupta contains a grand image of Errana and is adored by literatures with great zeal. The Sivalinga surprises the devotees by its colour - it is white on one
side and red on the other side. According to legend, the linga was drinking the milk of a cow in the form of a serpent, and when a cowherd beat the snake, it turned into white Sivalinga, and hence the red colour indicating the blood that came out when received the blow of the cowherd by his axe. Another special feature that strikes the eye here is the enormous tank in which thousand elephants according to local version were swimming at a time. It contains the beautiful images of Chandi, Subrahmanya, Virabhadra, Kumaraswamy etc.

It lies in the Kandukur taluq of Prakasam district and was called Netrapuri in the past and is accessible by bus from Kandukur.

KHAMMAM - GUNTIMALLESWARA SWAMY AALAYAM

To the east of this district head quarters town, there lies an ancient Siva temple called Gunti Malleswaraswamy Aalayam. It is built on the river Munera and was called Moudgalya in the past. The Sivalinga is self-manifested and very powerful, says the priest. Adjacent to the Sivalinga, there is the image of Virabhadra, and both are given equal importance in offering prayer services. There is another popular temple here going by the name of Narasimhaswamy Aalayam. This town was called Sthambhadri during the reign of Kakatiya kings.

It lies on the broad guage line. It is the rail head and possesses bus conveniences.

JONNAWADA - MALLIKARJUNA SWAMY AALAYAM

This ancient temple is lying on the very sacred place, where Tikkanna, a great Telugu poet performed yagna before commencing the translation of Vyasa’s Mahabharata from Sanskrit. It was called Jonnwada, due to the performance of yagna, another form is Jannam.
Mother Parvathi in the local name of Kamakshi Tayar abiding here is said to be very powerful and demonstrated her miracles on numberless occasions. It was dominated by Jains in the past but later Virasaivases occupied and ruled for a longer period, when many Sivaalayas were built here and around. Barren women and patients suffering from acute diseases offer prayers to the powerful deities after bathing in the river Penna. The miraculous powers of the potent deities are blessing them to their satisfaction. Hence heavy rush always.

It lies 20 Km off Nellore town enjoying all transport facilities.

**126 DEVUNIGUMPA - SOMESWARASWAMY AALAYAM**

This Saiva kshetra came into prominence even during Dwaparayuga, due to the fact of building of the temple and installation of the archamtri by Balarama, the immortal brother of Lord Sri Krishna. It lies at the confluence of Nagavalli and Vamsadhara rivers, so held in high esteem. The annual festival celebrated on Maghasuddha Chaturdasi lures large crowds, and gala performances take place.

It lies 12 Km off Parvathipuram of Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh.

**127 MUTTAYIKOTA - SIDDHESWARASWAMY AALAYAM**

This sacred kshetra has a strange origin. And it acquired great reputation of coming into existence due to the bidding of Aakasavani. As the aerial voice materialised this aalaya, its mahima was deemed great and people's faith in the Lord was infinite too. According to sthalapurana, once an old devout woman was travelling in a bullock cart to the neighbouring village. All on a sudden, she heard an aerial voice directing her to build a Sivaalaya
here, as the soil is permeating with Siva mahima. She obeyed the command forthwith. The adorers were liberally blessed and hence became a popular kshetra.

It lies 3 Km off Medak town of Medak district of Andhra Pradesh having bus and train convenience.

HEMAVATHI - DODDESWARASWAMY AALAYAM

The village Hemavathy has the unique honour of having four famous Sivaalayas built and patronised by Pallavas, and the sculptural adornments made by Nolamba artists of great fame. Among the four Siddheswara, Virupaksheswara, Malleswara and Doddeswara Aalayams, the last one is very famous and enshrines a six-foot-high Sivalinga. The walls are adorned with masterly sculptured images, narrating many episodes from the epics. Lord Siva reveals in his yoga posture in the Siddheswara Aalayam. All are visit worthy and were built in the eighth century.

It lies 35 Km off Madakasira of Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh enjoying bus and train facilities.

NANDIKANDI - RAMALINGESWARA AALAYAM

The Ramalingeswara Aalayam built by Kalyani Chalukyas, has certain unique features that set it apart from the rest of Sivaalayas. Its sculptural wealth is so great that it is luring both devotees and art lovers. It mesmerises any by its superb craftsmanship and detains long. The garbha griha is embellished with a star shaped Vimana, a plus point for merit and displays the builder's refined taste. The Sivalinga and Nandi are made of black granite, and they are big and grand. Among the superbly sculptured images, Brahma, Vishnu, Narasimha, Nataraja, Siva, Garuda, Mahishasuramardini, Gajalakshmi and Saraswathi deserve special mention and soulful veneration.
It lies 20 Km of Sangareddi town of Medak district of Andhra Pradesh having bus and train facilities.

**NIZAMABAD - NILAKANTESWARA SWAMY AALAYAM**

This district headquarters town of the same name possesses many holy temples dedicated to several gods, like Venkateswara, Ranganatha, Hanuma and Rama, besides Siva, which has the unique glory of worshipping by the Sun with his luminous rays once a year. This holy town has once called Indrapuri, which became Indur and later Nizambad due to impact of Muslim rule. The Venkateswaraswamy Aalayam here claims the special honour of sending its flag to Tirupathi every year on a particular occasion, and on its return devotees, who could not travel to the Tirumala worship it with great ardour. With these two plus points, it has been luring pious theists for over centuries. It also houses worshipful Saiva gods in appropriate niches.

It lies on the Kachiguda-Manmad Broad gauge line, having all facilities.

**RYALI - UMAKAMANDALESWARA AALAYAM**

Ryali etched its sacred name on the pages of legends for reasons more than one. The Jaganmohini KesavaSwamy image receiving worship both in the fore and rear has made it a unique temple, attracting all classes of people. Another colourful feather, it wears in its cap comes from the Umakamandaleswara Aalayam which does not lag behind either in fantastic origin, or consequent to its popularity. This is the only Siva temple in India where the Siva linga is seen without Somasutram, deemed indispensable for every Siva temple. The sthalapurana narrates that Siva followed Mohini, who distributed nectar that emerged from Kaheerasagara. Mohini in fear ran off,
but was followed by the love-lorn Siva, and at this place, one of the flowers worn by Mohini fell. When Siva took it and looked at her longingly, Mohini transformed herself into Vishnu. Fearing humiliation at the hands of Uma Devi, Siva preferred staying here in lingarupa, when Brahma made jalabhisheka from His kamandala water. So he is called Uma Kamandalaswara swamy. This temple contains many inscriptions and grand images. Its courtyards and minishrines, though modest are grand and well-maintained.

It lies 6 Km off Ravulapalem of West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh having bus and railway facilities upto Ravulapalem and then cart or cycle rickshaw.

132 CHEBROLU - NAGESWARASWAMY AALAYAM

Famous for possessing one of the very few Aalayas for Brahma, this little town boasts of a holy Sivaalaya enshrining a Sivalinga, going by the name of Nageswaralinga. Deemed as Kasi for having one hundred and one temples, this town had a glorious past with historical evidence in the form of inscriptions. Now only eight are existing, but they too are not properly maintained. This Nageswaralayam houses in its campus a big size Nandi equal to Lepakshi one in polish and furnish. This was built by Eastern Chalukyas. The fine sculpture adorning the walls and vimana are quite impressive.

133 SANGAM JAGARLAMUDI - SANGAMESWARA SWAMY AALAYAM

Though regarded as one of the hundred and eight divya Tirupathi kshetras for having a temple for Lord Venkateswara, this holy town possesses a holy Siva temple called Sangameswara Aalayam. This temple contains in its vast compound many shrines dedicated to Ganga, Kalabhairava, Parvathi etc. Many annual festivals, like Rathotsavam, Kalyanotsavam and Panchahnikasava, a
speciality here are celebrated with great eclat, when thousands congregate to offer worship. During then the prabhas - decorated chariots, as popularly and largely displayed in Kottappakonda festival go in procession and heighten the glory of celebration. A miss not occasion to theists.

It lies 8 Km off Tenali town enjoying all bus and train facilities.

SRIKAKULAM - EKARATRI MALLIKARJUNA AALAYAM

Though Srikakulam flashes across our minds the splendid image of Swayamvyakta Andhra Mahavishnu, and narrates many sports of Srikakuleswara, it also houses an ancient Sivaalaya. The presiding deity is called Ekaratri Mallikarjunaswamy. The historic town is the cradle of Devadasi dance and etched its name as a religio-cultural centre of great eminence on the pages of history. This kshetra is deemed one of the hundred and eight Divya Tirupathis. On account of the unprecedented popularity of Vaishnava Deity - Srikakulendraswamy, the Saivite god's mahatmya is a little bit obscured; yet this temple made a mark as a great Siva yatrasthala. The annual festival of Ekaratra Mallikarjunaswamy Brahmotsav is celebrated on a scale grand, with pomp and splendour. During then the Utsavamurti of Siva flanked by Ganga and Parvati on both sides is taken out in procession out-stepping the glory of the other deity. The temple is beautified with rare sculptural adornments.

It lies 36 Km off Machalipatnam, accessible by train and bus.

CHADIPIRALA - AGASTHEESWARA AALAYAM

This small town located in the Kamalapuram Mandalam of Cuddapah district of Andhra Pradesh houses
an ancient Sivaalayam of great significance. Sthalapurana places the origin in Tretayuga, and it is said to have been built by a renowned royal family. It is believed that Agasthya mahamuni adored this Lord with great fervour, and is visiting this temple regularly even today in his ethereal form. Some pious devotees confirm this and produce abundant evidence that they have seen Agasthyamuni coming out of the temple in the mornings after offering prayers. Its archamurti relieved the ardent devotees of their miseries. Though ancient and modest in proportions, it has all the component parts, like garbha griha, tower, prakara, courtyards etc.

It can be reached from Kamalapuram, or Cuddapah by bus.

136 VIDURASWARTHA - ESWARA AALAYAM

This ancient village shrine renowned for Tree worship - Aswartha Vriksa puja enshrines in its vast campus many adorable gods, like Anjaneya, Maheswara, particularly Nagadevathas in several sizes and shapes. The Siva shrine lies behind the most venerable Aswartha tree and while making pradakshana to the tree, we find this small shrine, and feel that the tree has eclipsed the glory of Siva in a way. It is a minishrine with a two-foot high Sivalinga installed on a modest sized panavatta. Saivagama puja is performed with ardour due. To its northern side there jets out an iron pipe fitted above the passage for the Abhisheka water to flow down into a hollow pit. Devotees always throng and apply their ears to the open end of the pipe believing that Omkara sound is heard and gods are worshipping the Lord. BELIEF GIVES RELIEF. Hence the craze.

It lies 10 km off Hindupur - a big town in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh and accessible by bus.
The Srisailam project of Andhra Pradesh, in addition to conferring a much-sought after boon on the agriculturists, has added another dazzling diamond to the crown of Andhra Mata by transferring some groups of temples from their original sites to safer and grander spots. Finding the newly proposed project would endanger the ancient temples lying along the course of river Krishna, the Government with its commendable forethought and admirable humanist insight decided to transfer these spiritual treasures - temples to safer and easily accessible parts. And it strove hard and completed successfully this operation and transplantation, if the medical terminology is applied. As it is unique and unheard of, the whole world gaping, gazed at this marvel. Kudos to the architects, whose ingenuity blessed the theists with many old temples in new surroundings, and what is more, built with the very self same materials used yugas back, since their sanctity defies description. They fall into two groups.

Among the temples thus transferred, Uma Maheswara group containing Jateswar Aalayam, Bhramaramba Malleswaraalayam, Virabhadra Aalayam, Madanagopala Aalayam deserve reverent mention. The second group consists of seventeen, and among them eleven are dedicated to Siva, and they go by the names of Agatheeswara, Uma Maheswara, Gangadhareswara, Kaleswara, Bhimeswara, Malleswara, Ramalingeswara, Rajarajeswara, Visweswara, Sambhulingeswara and Sambasiveswara. And the others are called Padmanathaswamy Aalayam, Dwaramandapa, Ammavari Aalayam, Chaturveda Aalayam, Bhairavaswamy Aalayam, and Virabhadrreswara Aalayam. All the archamurtis are well installed with modern additions. It is a Herculean task, involving huge sums of money and exquisite craftsmanship. The reinstallment ceremony was fittingly celebrated with due pomp and splendour on 15.2.1989 in the august presence of pithadhipathis, political leaders and stathathis - the specialists in that field. The devout theists expressed
their deep appreciation, and paid rich tributes to all those responsible for this monumental act, uttering that more than the original builders, the present architects did yeoman service to the religion and kept aloft the torch of devotion ever burning. Visitors are prostrating to the deities on their visit and feel emancipated at their sight.

This temple treasure lies at Gopalapuram on the way to Pebberu from Kolhapur in the Mehaboobnagar district of Andhra Pradesh.

138 BEKKAM - BEKKEŞWARA AALAYAM

This small village lying on the bank of river Krishna, housing the Bekkeswaralayam has a long legend. Its origin is as fantastic as its name; Bekk meaning “cat” according to Kannada language. In addition to this ancient seat of Siva, there is a group of five Sivaalayas going by the names of Siddheswara, Kapileswara, Someswara, Malleswara and Kaleswara at a distance of 15 kilometres. Hence the conjuncture that this was a famous Saivakshetra in the past. The sthalapurana of this Bekkeswaralayam embodies an account, that one this village ‘Bekkam’ was called Narasingarayapalli. One day, according to legend a cowherd saw a cow going into the palm grove and emptying its udder over an ant-hill voluntarily. Strangely enough, a cat lying hidden in the ant-hill came out and drank the entire quantity. When this oddity was reported, villagers dug out the ant-hill and found a beautiful black Sivalinga. Deeming it a great God-sent treasure, they built a small shrine and installed the Sivalinga, and called it Bekkeswara; for, this area was then largely populated by Kannadigas, and ‘Bekku’ in their language stands for cat. Hasn’t this Sivalinga emerged only due to the cat? Hence the apt name. The lord too demonstrated his sports and showered boons. Later some devout bhaktas brought two Sivalingas from Banaras and installed in the same compound, but in separate shrines. They are called Moksheswara and Saksheswara popularly. Hence it was a sacred yatras dista in the past, and continues to be so although it is small in dimensions.

It lies in Mahaboobnagar district of Andhra Pradesh and accessible by bus.
MEENAMBARAM - PARUSA VEDEESWARA AALAYAM

The antiquity of this kshetra dates back to Tretayuga and it is quite fascinating too. According to Gangapura legend, Nala, one of the Shatchakravartis, during his exile came to this region, and when he was eating the boiled fish, offered by the villagers, a few fell into the river, and at once they turned into live fish. As such this place was deemed then very holy, and realising its spiritual potentialities, one devotee by name Veerakambala built a big temple and dedicated it to Chennakesava, his household deity. Hearing its glory, Lord Siva descended to visit and adore the archamurti. During then, it so happened that two extremely ravishing fisher-virgins called — Ing and Thangi came into His sight on the bank of the river. He was irresistibly drawn to them and loved passionately too. So He said to them that He would live on the bank under the new name of Parusavedeeswara and would change their brass pots into gold, if they, touched the Sivalinga. He kept up his word and lured many, by showering several boons on the adorers. Gradually it became a great Saivakshetra of unprecedented fame. It was a big and well-built temple, but it tasted the wrath of Moghul emperor Aurangzeb and so was razed to the ground.

It is near Zaheerla of the Mahaboobnagar and accessible by bus.

KAUDUR - RAMALINGESWARA AALAYAM

This historic Saivakshetra is surrounded by seven hillocks, housing one god or the other atop, and they were patronised and endowed liberally by Cholas. On account of their settlement here in this place, they were called Kaudur Cholas. It is said that they installed one hundred lingas and worshipped them with great fervour. Among them Ramalingeswara Aalayam is one, and it was
on the top of a hillock. The special feature of this Sivalinga is that its panavattam is completely wheel shaped, in contradiction to the traditional shape of a rim drawn to a point on its north, for abhishek water to flow down into a receptacle, seen everywhere, except Dhundhibhihthira, where the Sivalinga is placed on a squared shaped panavatta. For this circular shape, there is a legend.

According to it, the priest of this place was ascending the hill everyday with his wife for attending to prayer services. Once during her pregnancy, she uttered that she could not come to Him for offering prayers as usual, and after delivery alone she would visit again. The merciful Bhagawan replied that He Himself would come down for her worship then itself, on the condition that she should not look back till reaching the foot of hill. Thanking Him, she started descending. She heard then the sounds of chariot wheels behind. Unable to resist the temptation, she turned to see the coming of Lord. At once the chariot broke and the wheels rolled down. And one of them fell into a tank and the other on its bank. As the splitting sound was loud, she fell down and died on the spot. Later some devotees built a temple installing the Sivalinga on the wheel in token of her devotion. Hence the wheel shaped panavatta. A similar incident is narrated about the Kotappa Konda temple also. This temple faces west and has all the parts except Nandi opposite the Sivalinga. In addition, it has six minishrines in the compound enshrining six lingas, one each. The successors of Cholas were Kakatiyas, who usually worshipped the Lord six times a day, and perhaps they might have installed them to represent their practice. There are many adorable deities, such as Gouri, Virabhadra, Ganapathi, exquisitely sculptured and fittingly installed. It was and is a largely visited Sivaalaya.

It lies in Mahaboobnagar district of Andhra Pradesh accessible by bus.
KALUVAKOLANU - NANDI KOTEESWARA AALAYAM

This kshetra was sanctified by three holy lingas installed in three separate shrines by a devout feudatory Lord called Jayalakshmipati. They are called Nandi Koteeswaraalayam, Sivaalayam and Mukundaalayam. This place was once the capital of Kakatiya kings when its spiritual eminence spread far and wide. Later Muslim rulers brought incalculable destruction to the temple and its pious devotees. The speciality of the archamurti now worshipped is that there are seven Sivalingas placed one over the other by the marvellous craftsmanship of the sculptor. The panavattas have small holes around the lingas to enabling the abhisheka water flow down from top to bottom. So a single abhishek suffices the purpose and applies to the seven at the same time. Its uniqueness draws instant veneration to the Lord and to the maker too. His supreme artistry is quite unique, as it is not imitated by any one since then. As it is the only one of its kind, it merits indispensable visitation. This is found in the Nandigudi, but not in its fullest splendour; for, the Muslim iconoclasts mutilated it. Yet, devout bhakts are worshipping it still, as it was done in the past. Though in ruins, it deserves visitation.

It lies in the district of Mahaboobnagar of Andhra Pradesh accessible by bus and train.

TALLAPAKA - SRI SIDDHESWARA SWAMY AALAYAM

Tallapaka has the unique honour producing a great Vaggeyakara-Annamayya, whose lyrical output and its glory raised the fame of that little village to the intercontinental level. So Tallapaka and Annamayya have become interrelated, rather they are inseparable in a way. But the pre-eminence of Siddheswaraswamy Aalayam, existing there for several centuries now seems eclipsed, rather it is bypassed, to speak the truth. An unforgivable commission,
if truth is accepted. This ancient temple with its grand Sivalinga, about two feet in height with several other grand big size icons of Saivite deities, like Mother Parvathi locally called Kamakshi Amma, Vinayaka, Chandisa, Dakshinamurti, Subrahmany with his two consorts, Virabhadra, Kalabhairava and the life size image of Maheswar enjoyed a glittering past. And it impresses the devout bhaktas, that the undying glory of that padakavitha pitamaha and the fame of once unknown village have emanated only from Siddheswaraswamy that Omnicompassionate, who demonstrated many sports in the dim past. The locals give an exuberant account of its memorable past and celebrate its annual festivals in August every year on a grand scale. Soon after the Kalyanotsavam, the Utsavamurthis are taken out in procession through the streets of village, and it is believed they give salvation with a single darshan. Cultural activities like dance, dramas, religious discourses, folk entertainments make the village a veritable Kailas for about a week or so then. Among the eyeful sculptural beauties packed to the doors inside, the image of Ekatatayya deserves mention. Belief is current that the ailment of headache takes to heels, if the victim bends his head before this Tatayya, who it appears was a life long bachelor and lured by the Sivalila, settled down here doing Saivaaradhana and so gained spiritual powers unlimited. The believed are relieved and the sceptics chuckling go out for tablets only to aggravate it after momentary relief. It is a worth-seeing temple of supreme importance.

It lies 3 km of Rajampet, the taluq head quarters of the same name accessible by bus from there or Cudappah.

143 KANIPAKAM - MANIKANTESWARA ALAYAM

As far back as in the eleventh century, this holy Kanipakam enjoyed ample royal patronage to the building of a great temple for Lord Siva. It was Rajarajendra, who with his Midas touch materialised here an imposing temple
and adorned it with rare sculptural pieces. Huge sums of money were diverted from the royal exchequer to making a magnificent Sivaalaya with provision for all the worshipful gods like Surya, Durga, Brahma, besides Shanmuga, Vinayaka, Dhakshinamurti etc. The art critics and archeologists praised this Saivite shrine highly. It is indispensably visited by orthodox Saivates and ardent bhaktas of the Sajiva Pratyaksha Dharmamurti Pillayarappa, the presiding deity of this kshetra, after prayers, on their visits. Renovation is sadly needed and it certainly rejuvenates the flagging spirit of Saivaaradhana and restores it to former glory. “Sooner the better” utter the visiting devotees before leaving the temple complex.

It lies 12 km off Chittoor, the district head quarters town of the same name, and can be reached by bus running from the old bus stand every half an hour.

144 KALESWARAM - MUKTEESWARALAYAM

Of the three Saiva kshetras forming the boundaries of the Trilingadesa that blessed its people with rich Telugu language, Kaleswaram is one, the others being Draksharamam and Sri Kalahasti. It is a famous thirtha kshetra abounding in many holy temples dedicated to both Vaishnavates and Saivite gods, like Venkateswara Aalayam, Bindu Madhavaswamy Aalayam, Chandrasekhara Aalayam, Someswara Aalayam, Saraswati Aalayam, Adi Muktiswara Aalayam; Annapurna Aalayam and Balarajeswara Aalayam.

It lies on the southern bank of Godavari and moreover Pranahita, a tributary joins Godavari here and hence deemed very sacred and called Dakshina Kasi. Another plus point it claims is - it is at the confluence of three states - Andhra, Maharasthra and Madhya Pradesh. Its legendary importance too is exceedingly great. Skanda purana eulogises its glory elaborately. Sri Rama is said to have visited this place. There are certain oddities in this Aalayam.

One, two Sivalingas - Kaleswaralinga and Mukteeswaralinga are installed on one and the same
Panavatta; it is a rare feature; two, there are two holes on the Mukteeswaralinga that could never be filled with whatever quantity of water poured into them; there, there are some signs of Buddhist traditions in this Sivalaya and finally it is believed that there is an underground passage that takes the water to Godavari. Kaleeswaralinga receives agrapuja always. Above all, this temple houses many rare images, like Surya, Matsya and Brahma. Saivagama puja is offered regularly.

Enshrining such unique features, this ancient kshetra is luring a steady stream of devotees throughout the year.

It lies about 30 km off Manthana in Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh commanding all transport facilities.

PEDAKKANI - SIVAALAYAM

The little village of Pedakakani lying midway between Vijayawada and Guntur, the most advanced Premier cities of Andhra Pradesh, enshrines an ancient Sivaalaya of great spiritual eminence. Many illustrious Maharshis worshipped the Lord for having killed formidable demons inhabiting this region in the dim past. Lord Siva at the earnest appeals of the afflicted, relieved them once for all by destroying him and his race enmasse. The grateful people requested the Lord to dwell there itself for the profit of adoration. Assuring them round the clock vigilance He has been abiding in the linga since then. Later, royalty built a grand temple and devout bhaktas endowed it liberally.

It is now one of the famous temples in the district of Guntur luring a speady stream of devotees. On annual festivals, its glory so as higher, when thousands congregate and perform several special prayer services. The temple has vast courtyards artistic finish and polish installed on a high dias wrings veneration at the first sight itself. The Nagadevathas installed in the rear portion are worshipped ardently. Devout bhaktas redeem their vows with special
offerings. Mondays attract great crowds since it is very auspicious for Saivaradhana.

It is accessible by bus or trains from Vijayawada or Guntur easily.

**MANGALAGIRI - BHRAMARAMBA MALLESWARAALAYAM**

The very name, 'Mangalagiri' conjures up an awesome picture of Lord Narasimha and His fantastic craze for panakam-jaggery beverage, which He swallows gallons after gallons every day. This holy kshetra has many awe-inspiring legends taking their origin as far back as in Tretayuga itself; and it is one of the famous centres of Narasimhopasana, and a pilgrim town of All India fame. There are several temples atop the hill called Hastasringi parvat and down below, like Venkateswaraswamy Aalayam, Satyanarayananswamy Aalayam, Rajyalakshmi Narasimhaswamy Aalayam, Bhramaramba Malleswaraswamy Aalayam etc. It is a Hariharakshetra first and last. And always at it.

This Bhramaramba Mallikarjuna temple is one of the main Aalayas lying at the foot of the hill. It is equally popular in luring adorers, despite surrounded by several Vaishnavate Aalayas, and what is more popular due to the magnetic pull, Sri Panakala Narasimhaswamy is exerting by His exciting thirst for panakam and showering boons liberally. Of the special features of this Saivite shrine, the beautiful image of Brahmaramba in standing posture lying next to Malleswaraswamy is quite enticing. The floral decoration enhanced by the dazzling jewels of the six-foot-high archamurtis — the Adidampati is such a quite enchanting sight that lives in the memory of viewers permanently. The craftsmanship of the sculptor is decidedly superb. The temple contains all the worshipful Saivite gods like, Vinayaka, Mother Parvathi, Muruga etc. in appropriate niches, and are adored with great fervour. The temple though not as big as the Rajyalakshmi Narasimhaswamy temple; it is visited by the devotees regularly in large
numbers. Periodical festivals are celebrated matching to the divinity and position of the deities.

It lies 15 km off Vijayawada, the Premier city of Andhra Pradesh, commanding air, rail, road facilities. And can be reached by town bus from Vijayawada.

CHITTOOR - SIVAALAYAM

The district of Chittoor, one of the premier districts of Rayalaseema, an integral part of the state of Andhra Pradesh claims a unique honour for its special features, numbering more than one. It is this district that has the honour of possessing the lone summer resort of the state - the Horsley Hills; the seat of Balaji, the Lord of Seven Hills and the the six continents, rather of the three worlds; and the seat of Besant Theosophical College etc. etc. etc. The laurels it has brought to the state are numerous and their glory is conspicuous.

The Chittoor town bearing the same name of the district, has many spiritual havens built for all the gods of Hindu pantheon, like Sri Rama temple, Murugan temple, Vinayaka temple, Siva temple and Sakti temples in Her multifarious manifestations. Around the town at short distances too there are very many shrines, like Kanipakkam Pillayarappa temple, Magleswara temple etc, that have been emitting Siva mahima for centuries now, to say the least. To crown as it were Tirumala, enshrining Balaji temple of interplanetary eminence lies at a short distance—60 km only. Of the many Aalayas, the temple built for Siva are many and are seen both in main streets and at its outskirts. Some of them are very old, but the agamic worship conducted is retaining its firm hold, and hence the attraction. Heavy rush is seen during the mornings and evenings.

All these lie in town itself and can be reached by autos, cycle rickshaws from the railway station or bus stand.
KUPPAM - OLD SIVAALAYAM

This little but enchanting town of Chittoor district, lying on the borders of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka has a fragrant story that is captivating the hearts of the affluent gay elite in far off continents like Europe, and America too. Its sandalwood oil industry, the only one of its kind and the pride of the state with its quality products catapulted the glory of Andhra Pradesh to a commendable degree. Moreover, with a wide variety of commercial crops it is producing, it has become instrumental in spreading its name in many far off states like Maharastra etc. Its salubrious climate and evergreen forests around are some of its special points. It also houses many places of worship dedicated to all gods of the Hindu Pantheon, like Vinayaka, Rama, Kaliamma, Siva and the like. Of the Sivaalayas, the ancient Sivaalaya lying in the old town deserves mention. Though pretty old, its grip on the theists is decidedly great. Both young and old throng this temple in the evenings and mornings. Saivate gods are installed in well-built niches. Saivagama puja is performed with strict adherence to agamic rules to the accompaniment of rituals. Periodical festivals too are celebrated on a grand scale.

It lies in the heart of the town and accessible by walk or richshaws, and Kuppam is on the broad guage line of Southern Railway between Madras and Bangalore.

GUNTUR - SIVAALAYAM

The culturally advanced and commercially thriving town of Guntur enjoyed a pre-eminent place in the history of Andhra Pradesh, and its coastal region. The import-oriented commercial crops like tobacco and cotton, in addition to bumper harvests of paddy and pulses raised the state economy to an enviable degree of importance. Its socio-political life too is far advanced, along with registering a high reputation in the field of literature. The district, bearing the same name has scores of famous shrines of both antiquity and modernity. Their maintenance
is emulation worthy. The religious life is marching hand in hand with other aforesaid activities.

Among the dozens of temples built for Rama, Vinayaka, Sakti, Vasavi, Anjaneya, the Sivaalayyas have acquired commendable reputation on the basis of performance of functions and conduct of periodical festivals. The involvement of the organisers deserve mention.

There are two Sivaalayyas that have been carrying on Saivaaradhana activities with a devotional fervour of supreme type. These ancient Sivaalayyas are built in the busy parts of the town. They are imposing in construction and are enshrining all the adorable Saivate gods like Vinayaka, Subrahmanyaswamy, Mother Parvathi, Dhakshinamurti etc.

They are accessible by bus and rikshaw from Railway Station or bus stand.

PRODDUTUR - SIVAALAYAM

Proddutur, one of the highly advanced and most flourishing towns in the district of Cuddapah of Andhra Pradesh, boasts of two grand Siva temples of great antiquity. This major town is making spectacular progress in the fields of commerce, religion and literature, as evidenced by enviable trade connections it has with major metropolitan cities of India, and enshrining ancient temples, besides being the birth place of some famous poets. The Kanyakaparameswari temple with its imposing dimensions and grand architectural adornments has won laurels to the spiritual glory of the country. The lavish expenditure on a wide variety of devotional programmes it has been carrying on, mirrors its great contribution to the furtherance of theism. The very same community is extending its support to the performance of Saivagamic spiritual activities of the Sivaalayyas of the town.

The two Sivaalayyas are situated, strangely enough in posh localities, one in the old town, amidst good old buildings and business establishments, and the other in
the upcoming modern locality called Light Palem. They contain all the worshipful Saivate gods in beautifully built niches. People visit in thousands both in mornings and evenings. The periodical festivals like Sivaratri are conducted on grand scale deserving emulation.

They lie in the old town and new town and are accessible by train upto Yarraguntla on the broad gauge line of Southern Railway, and from four wheelers from there.

151 PITHAPURAM - KUKKUTESWARA SWAMY AALAYAM

Pithapuram has the singular fortune of enshrining a Saktipitha, besides the famous Kukkuteswara Aalaya of immense spiritual significance and the legendary Padagaya tank. The temple campus abounds in many shrines dedicated to Sri Rama, Kumaraswamy, Venkateswaraswamy, Venugopalswamy and Kuntimadhavaswamy. It is a visit-worthy pilgrim centre, famous in legend and history. The royal family of this town made a mark by patronising arts and letters, and their contribution for the religious progress too is highly commendable. So its historicity too heightened the glory of this glorious kshetra.

Kukkuteswaraswamy, as the presiding deity is called, reveals Himself in lingakara, and it is a white marble stone of about two feet in height. Due to crowing like cock, and the linga resembling the back of cock, Lord Siva is called Kukkuteswaraswamy. He fulfils the desires of bhaktas without austerities of severe nature. Hence the thronging of devotees in large number always. It is a Swayambhu linga and it is believed that water is trickling down into a pot from his nose. This potent murti was worshipped by Maharshi Vyasa, Valmiki, Agastya ardently for long.

It lies in the taluq head quarters town of Pithapuram, lying at a distance of 18 km to Kakinada in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.
Tirukkovil is the honorific name for Temple in Tamil Nadu, so used for the following.

TENKASI - VISWANATHAR
TIRUKKOVIIL

This renowned shrine was materialised by Lord Viswanatha Himself by directing to a pious Pandyan King, in a dream Parakrama by name to build a temple here in this holy spot. Deeming the direction a unique fortune showered on him unsought for, the king forthwith started construction, befitting his royalty and the divinity of the Lord. On completion, he installed a linga and named it Kasi Viswanathar, and another icon for Lokambikai, the local name for Mother Parvathi, in a separate shrine. It is believed that the Ganges water flowed into the temple Pushkarini at the bidding of Siva Himself. That is local belief current, and visitors bath in it before offering worship.

Misfortune struck the beautifully sculptured tall nine-storyed tower some two years back, but renovation programme restored it to former glory along with some other additions, like the idol of Balasubrahmanya to the sacred shrine. Prayer rituals are performed with Agamic rules. It is one of the great pilgrimage centres in the down South luring a steady influx of bhaktas throughout the year.

It lies near Tirunelveli, the district Head Quarter town to Tamil Nadu and commands all transport facilities.

KUTRALAM - KUTRALANATHAR
TIRUKKOVIIL

In the holy picnic town of Kutralam, there is a little, yet charming Sivan kovil, enshrining a big Sivalinga, going by the name of Kutralanathar. It has the proud privilege of receiving worship by almost all devout bhaktas and chance picnic tourists after bath, who visit the waterfalls for bath, presuming a dip in the water cures
skin diseases. And soon after the bath, all, invariably direct their steps into the mandir for soulful worship, invoking the Lord to cure their malady—mental or physical. And Lord Siva too is bestowing boons and lifting them in accordance with the merit of devotion. He never left pitey cry in wilderness. The temple, though small contains all the Saivate gods.

It is very near to Tirunelveli, the district head quarters town of the same name in Tamil Nadu.

SANKARAN KOVIL -
SANKARANAYANAR TIRUKKOVIL

Divine sports defy analysis and description. One such sport was played here by Lord Siva. Legends recorded that Mother Parvathi did penance for nine days in the month of Adi for the boon of seeing Siva and Vishnu in one and the same body. On the full moon day, Lord Siva appeared before her in the Sankaranarayana form to fulfil her desire. She was pleased and adored Him to her heart's content. Temples were built by the ruling princes, realising the sacredness of the spot. And bhaktas are being blessed since then. Now there are three temples one for Sankaranarayanan, another for Gomati Amman, local name for Mother Parvathi and the last one for Siva in lingakara. It is a Harihara kshetra of great importance. To perpetuate that great event, every year a festival called Aditapas is celebrated with great eclat. Belief is current that the Mother cures all kinds of chronic diseases, if the victims fast and pray at the feet of the Mother with pure devotion.

It lies at a distance of 55 km to Tirunelveli, commanding all types of conveyance facilities.

TIRUPPARAKUNRAM - KASI VISWANATHAR TIRUKKOVIL

The well-known hill temple at Tirupparakunram, one of the Arupadividus dedicated to Lord Subrahmanya, where
his wedding was celebrated with Devayani, enshrines Kasi Viswanathar Tirukkovil atop the very little hill in which he is abiding. This temple contains, among all, the stone image of Nakkeerar, a Tamil poet of great eminence, who challenged Lord Siva in a literary bout and won his argument. Saivagama worship is offered to the lingam.

It lies at 10 km from Madurai, the Premier temple city commanding all types of conveyances including that of airways.

**156 TIRUCHI TAYUMANAVAR TIRUKKOVIL**

This world famous historic city contains many spiritual treasures in and around it, that are luring a steady stream of devotees and tourists throughout the year. Srirangam, Tiruvanikkal, Tirupparaithurai, Veilur are only a few to mention among them. In the heart of city, and on the top of the hill there is a great Tirukkovil dedicated to Siva. And the Sivalinga is a very huge one that raises and joins the palms at its very sight. Placed on a high dias and decorated with ash marks and a round sandal paste in the middle, this Siva appears in the benign aspect and rains boons on the devotees over and above their expectation. And justifies the attribute of Karunaikasindhu aptly added to His name. Here Saivagama worship is offered with due veneration. The story of His getting the popular honorific title-Tayum Anavir is quite captivating and deserves constant mention for emancipation.

According to belief current, once a pious lady was experiencing labour pains one day, when there was heavy down pour. Her mother, who could attend on her had to come from a nearby village, lying on the other side of river Cauvery. As the river was in spate and rising every minute, the unfortunate victim wailed in distress. Who will listen except that All-benevolent Siva and readily come to the rescue of the Saranagata? Soon, the suffering victim was visited by an unknown mid-wife, who successfully attended to the delivery process. Before the wonder ceased, there appeared the human mother braving the calamity of crossing the river. In a flash, the divine mother
disappeared. The grateful devotees built a befitting memorial to the Lord on the hill spending liberally. The Lord was named ‘Tayum Anavar’ which became corrupt and now popular as Tayumanavar. There is no limit to Siva’s anugrah, nor novelty and literature ever capture His infinite mercy in words or innovations. There are huge icons installed beautifully in the minishrines.

This lies in the centre of Tiruchirapalli city commanding airways, roadways and railways.

TRIBHUWANAM - KAMPAHRESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This tirukkovil was built by the redoubtable Tribhuvana Chakravarti as a standing memorial to his digvijaya yatra to the North; and it is standing as a tower of victory heralding his military prowess. The exquisite sculpture adorning the 160-foot-high tower, and inside walls speak high of his devotional fervour. It is a very big temple and conforms to every detail of the temple construction, enunciated by Sekkilar. The legend behind the archamurti narrates that Siva assumed a strange Sarabha form - half human and half animal to subduing the divine fury of Lord Vishnu, who incarnated as Narasimha to killing that asuradham a Hiranyakasipu, boasting of this Ahambrhamaswi creed. The sculptors' mastery strikes the eye from every frame of the temple. This temple has vast courtyards and innumerable minishrines for the adorable gods. It was visited by the Navalars who immortalised its glory in fine lyrics.

It is about 8 km off Kumbhakonam, the temple city of great renown and commands both rail and road facilities.

TIRUVARUR - SRI TYAGARAJAR TIRUKKOVIL

This holy temple town is doubly famous for both visible and invisible worshipful personages belonging to the
celestial and terrestrial world. Here was born the Musical trinity - Tyagaraja, Samastray, Muthuswamy Dikshithar, who lulled by their melodious tones both class and mass of devotees and turned them god-wards by devotional themes they incorporated in their songs. Several saint sages like Appar, Sundarar, Sambandar, Arunagirinathar etc., poured out their souls in verse bringing out the glory of the Lord. It is a very big tirukkovil containing numerous niches for adorable deities. And a separate big shrine for the image of Mother Parvathi, in the local name of Kamalambigai is installed in yogagana pose. The Vinayaka of this shrine is so powerful that he inspired Dikshitar to composing the most popular song - 'Vatapiganapathim ...'. A separate independent little pavilion outside the compound treasures up the stone image of Manunithi Cholan, who kept the scales even by passing death sentence to his son, for killing a calf by careless driving of his chariot. Among the uniques of this place, the Azhi Ther - the tirukkovil car deserves mention first, and it is the biggest of its kind in India, and requires eighty thousand men to draw through the streets during the annual festival. A sight indeed! A boon desirable!! A pride pardonable!!

This temple town lies at 40 km east off Tanjore and commands all modes of conveyances.

159 TIRUNALLAR - DHARBASAYANESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

The mention of Tirunallaru flashes across our minds the famous shrine of Sani Bhagawan, one of the nine planets ruling over the destinies of mankind. By nature of his office, he is undoubtedly proud and malefic besides responsible to causing untold misery to mankind. He is more feared than revered. Every sinner is mortally afraid of his potent power. This temple for Saturn forms an integral part of Lord Siva's shrine going by the name of Dharbasyaneshwarar Tirukkovil. The Siva linga is unusually big and worshipped as Nallarushamy. Many devotees were lifted by the abundant mercy of this Omnicompassionate Siva. Nala Chakravarti, a renowned emperor was
emancipated by this presiding deity, when sought abhayam during the period of his passing endless hardships thrust upon him by Saturn. There is a tank called Nalathirtham, where he obtained redemption.

The formidable Saturn is housed in a niche only in the outer prakara of the Dharbasayaneswarar Tirukkovil, and like the proverbial camel, he pushed out the benefactor. How strange! Regular pujas are conducted, and the devotees of Saturn out number Lord Siva 'bhaktas. Who out grown whom, if analysed dispassionately, only Siva gets precedence over Saturn; for, it is on account of His giving refuge alone Saturn's reputation is mounting higher and higher. Both are adorable and heads must be bent before them with equal veneration; for, the director and the directed are discharging their functions for the welfare of humanity. Worship fetches and memory lifts.

It lies in the small town of Tirunallaru, and 5 km off Karaikal, the sea port enjoying all transport facilities.

160 TIRUVOTTIYUR - ADIPUREESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This much venerated tirukkovil claims many awe-inspiring episodes that occurred in the lives of devotees of this powerful Adipureeswarar. Its uniqueness lies in the Presiding deity, who unlike in other Sivan tirukkovils is found in the form of ant-hill. It resembles Tiruppangur tirukkovil, connected with the famous Nayanmar-Nandanar. Besides the divine miracles performed by the Lord, His adorers too demonstrated their daiva sakthi through miracles of infinite variety that made sceptics into real theists. Pattinathar, a reputed Tamil ascetic-poet, who lived in this region displayed his soul power through several incredible wonders and lifted duhkarts from the snares of misery. The grateful theist community built a samadhi for him here itself for adoration. Here in this temple campus there lie the Panchabhisthala lingas, like Aakasalinga, Tejolinga, Jalalinga etc. Ekapadeswarar, an odd representation of Siva is beautifully carved on the wall of the main temple and
it is attracting the reverent attention of the visitors. Here there are many sculptural adornments deserving ardent worship. This temple has two tanks and two Sthala Vrikshas, besides the Sahasralinga—a tall, huge, black, granite linga that lifts souls at its mere sight. This Lord was worshipped by Kalianayanar, Sundarar etc. The images of the famous saints like Pattinathar and Appar are installed in grand niches. As the presiding deity saved the city from great deluge the place is called Tiruvottiyur. There are several other lingas here.

During its heyday in medieval period, many celebrated kings made liberal endowments and participated in the annual festivals with unprecedented religious fervour, worthy of emulation. In memory of Adi Sankara’s visit to this shrine, an image is installed and worshipped.

It lies 8 km north off Madras and can be reached by city bus.

(161) MYLAPORE - KAPALEESWARAR TIRUKKOVI

This sacred shrine carved out a covetable niche in the temple that Bharata Khand is. Legends eulogise the glory of the presiding deities extensively, men of divine powers and celebrated literary luminaries like Vayilar Nayanmar and Valluvar were born here and worshipped the Lord in an exemplary way. Among the unique features, celebration of annual festival held in honour of the 63 illustrious Nayanmars takes precedence over others and it falls in the month of Pangunimasa. The inimitable poetess Avvayyar is depicted through sculpture as lifted to heaven by Vinayaka in the form of elephant. The image of the elephant with its uplifted trunk illustrates this event and is honoured by bowing at its mere sight. The Mother is called Karpagavalli Tayar and according to local version Sri Rama worshipped this archamurti.

Above all, Mother Parvathi assuming the form of peacock worshipped Siva with exceptional fervour for deliverance. This is elaborately portrayed through exquisite
sculpture in the northern prakara of this Tirukkovil. The twin temples enshrining a big Sivalinga in the big shrine and a black granite icon of Mother Parvathi in the other are lying side by side and they are adorned with many sculptural adornments of high order. The icons of Durga, Subrahmanya, Ganapathi, Navagrahas, Nayanamars and other adorable deities are accommodated in and out of the main temples. The court yards are vast, and the beautiful tall towers are abundantly embellished with many puranic figures. The tank that lies just opposite the eastern tower, called Kapali is fairly big, and heightening the sanctity of the tirukkovil and the dignity of the locality. The icons of Vinayaka, Saneswar Bhagawan and many adorable lingas installed in individual minishrines are star attractions of this holy shrine.

This sacred shrine lies in Mylapore, one of the Principal parts of Madras, the Cosmopolitan city of intercontinental reputation commanding all transport facilities. Being the capital of Tamil Nadu state all are found aplenty.

TIRUKKAIKUNRAM - VEDAGIRISWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This famous ancient Tirukkovil town more popularly known as Pakshitheertham has an awe-some legend that is drawing thousands of yatri and paryatakas. Everyday at it. This punyakshetra has Sivan Tirukkovils both at the bottom and atop a charming little hill provided with flight of steps. The legend, though imbued with mysticism, the evidence in the form of the regular visit of two kites drives home Lord Siva’s matchless compassion. It narrates that once two devout sages - one hailing from Rameswaram and an other from Kasi did penance, propitiating Siva. When the Lord appeared, satisfied with their austure tapas, they prayed for eternal adoration to the Lord in the form of kites of special type. It was granted. This happened in bygone yugas; but still the kites are visiting this place at noon everyday with unbroken rigidity. The priests feed them with the prasad of Siva punctually at about 12 noon; which
they take one or two beakfuls. The prasad that is sanctified by their beaks is sold to the spectators, who await and witness this event with baited breath. It is a daily occurrence, yet its oddity is enticing, and the craze for a gaze is on the increase. The Tirukkovils atop contain the icons of rishis, Parvathi, Subrahmanya, Siva, besides the big Sivalinga in the centre of the cell. Once in every twelve years, there is celebrated Idipuja that attracts huge crowds. Down below, Siva is worshipped as Moovar in a well-built big temple. It has also a big Sivalinga in addition to other images. The famous Tamil saints - Appar, Sundarar, Sambandar and Manikyavachakar worshipped this Siva alone to the exclusion of the other one installed in the hill temple, fearing that they would desecrate the holy shrine above by their mortal feet, if ascended. There are three sacred thirthas called Sanku thirtha, Pakshi thirtha and Nandiswar thirtha. Devotion knows no bounds, nor does it confine to one kind only for its expression?

This town lies 40 km off Madras and enjoys all transport facilities.

**ERODE - LORD SIVA TIRUKKOVIL**

This is an ancient Tirukkovil that possess exquisite sculptural beauties and valuable inscriptions. It is commanding a steady stream of devotees always as it is located in the centre of town. Saivagama puja is conducted during regular and festival days. All the Saivate gods are installed in grand minishrines. Periodical festivals celebrated with pomp and splendour attracts huge crowds.

It is the district head quarters down of Periar district and enjoys all transport facilities.

**TIRUNELVELI - KANTIMATI NELLIAPPAR TIRUKKOVIL**

The ancient twin temples dedicated to Kantimati and Nelliappar have adorned many pages of legends and
history due to demonstration of many Sivalilas here. The Sivan Tirukkovil is regarded as one of the five Sabhas called Tamrasabha. Many royal families endowed it lavishly and made it an exquisite gem of sculptural art. Besides it is possessing rare jewels gifted by rulers and philanthropists. The thousand pillared Hall is adorned with beautiful carvings of high craftsmanship and the parivaradhevathas are fittingly installed in grand niches. The musical pillars emitting distinct sounds lure the visitors and wring their admiration. It has many fascinating tales.

The town Tirunelveli owes its origin to a devout priest living and adoring this Lord in an exemplary way, and he was called Veda Sarma. As his dedicated life won the appreciation of people, they were regularly gifting him paddy during the harvest season for his maintenance. In a certain year the farmers gave him liberally due to bumper harvest. He heaped it up in his compound. All on a sudden there was a heavy down pour and the river overflowed its banks. His paddy was threatened to be engulfed by the flood and would soon be carried away by it. He then ripped open his heart and prayed to His istadaivam piteously to come to his succour. Soon a stockade - Veli was materialised in a flash around his Nel-paddy and protected it from being washed off. The overjoyed crowds hailng his devotion called this place Nel-veli. Later, it became Tirunelveli due to addition of prefix Tiru to praise its glory. With the passage of time, a big temple came up and around it a big town too that became the head quarters of district.

The temple lies in the heart of the Tirunelveli town, the head quarters town of the same name enjoying all transport facilities.

KUDUMAIMALAI -
SIKHARAGIREESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This ancient temple town situated in the district of Puddukottai, the erstwhile capital of the Princely state of the same name has many sculptural marvels. It treasures
up beautiful carvings embellishing the walls and the thousand pillared hall. It received munificent endowments by the Pallava kings, and is famous for inscriptions of a wide variety, depicting the Patrons' rare culture. All the rituals are performed according to Saivagamas. Its past glory covered many pages in the history of South India. Lord Siva in the local name of Sirkuragireeswarar has been showering boons on the devotees liberally. Its legends are many and beneficiaries are countless. Having enjoyed the royal patronage, its splendour is exceedingly great.

It lies 20 km off Pudukkottai and enjoys all facilities of transport.

KODUMBALLUR - MOOVAR TIRUKKOVIL GROUP

This ancient temple group built by Boodhi Vikramakesari of Chola dynasty treasures up exquisite sculpture and stands as a specimen of the much prized Dravidian architectural style. This is a Tirukkovil built for three divinities, but only two are existing now immortalising the royal patronage and the glory of the adorable gods. There is another gem of Chola's patronage called Muchukundeswarar Tirukkovil, where Lord Siva is worshipped with great devotional fervour. The royalty spared no pains to endow it with divinity through profuse sculptural beauties.

It lies in Kodumballur 36 km off Pudukkottai, accessible by train or bus.

PERUR - PATTEESWARAR TIRUKKOVL

The districts of Coimbatore and Periar, the ever flourishing parts of erstwhile Kongunadu empire boasts of many spiritual treasures in the form of holy shrines built, endowed and patronised by imperial Cholas of the bygone days. Their antiquity, glory, exquisite sculpture, and above
all several miracles produced by the presiding deities have brought great reputation, and won covetable places in the history of South India. Some of them are maintaining former splendour and luring thousand of devotees and tourists perennially. Their charm too has not undergone great change due to renovations carried on by philanthropists and State Government from time to time.

Among them Perur Patteeswarar Tirukkovil dedicated to Lord Siva deserves reverent mention. It is an invaluable gift by Karikala Chola and lies in the vicinity of Coimbatore, the Manchester of South India. It is on the bank of river Noyyal. The Presiding deity Mahadev goes by the name of Patteeswarar and his spouse Pachai Nayaki. The hugeness of the Tirukkovil and its exquisite sculpture detain the devotees longer. Saivagama worship is offered with great fervour.

It is 7 km west off Coimbatore city and accessible by city buses, and the city commands transport facilities, like railways, roadways and airways too.

168 BHAVANI - SANGAMESWARAR TIRUKKOVI

This famous temple town Bhavani lying at the confluence of three rivers - Cauvery, Bhavani and Amuda has a glorious past. It is reverentially called Triveni of the South due to its location mainly. Here lies on its bank an ancient Kovil dedicated to Lord Siva and is adored with the local name of Sangameswarar. Many illustrious divine persons like Kubera, Viswamitra etc. worshipped this Lord with great devotional zeal. It has British devotees to its credit. Pleased with the glory of the Lord, the British beneficiaries donated articles of great worth and are duly preserved even today. The presiding deity justifies the attribute-Bhaktajanaparijata by lifting the deserving bhaktas on umpteen occasions. The historic evidence of a devout British officer - Garrow who was informed by Mother Gowri in the form of a little girl to move to another house, and consequent to his adherence saved him from untimely
death, since the building collapsed forthwith. It is narrated to the visiting public by the locals with great gusto. The greatful officer donated several valuable gifts to the temple and they greet the eyes of the visitors on entering the temple.

It lies in the Bhavani town, accessible by rail and road from Coimbatore or nearby towns. And it is 14 km off Erode.

UDUMALPET - RAMALINGESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

It was built on the bank of the rivulet near the Thirumurti Hills and is attracting devout bhaktas regularly. Proximity to the Thirumurthi Dam, and being situated between Palani and Coimbatore on the National Highway, it is commanding a steady influx of devotees. The Lord too is bestowing boons liberally too. A visit-worthy Tirukkovil, possessing all the adorable deities housed in the appropriate minishrines. Modernity peeps at the devotees and it is a well maintained temple.

It is accessible by bus and is 20 km away from Udumalpet.

AVINASI - AVINASALINGESWARAR TIRUKOVIL

This ancient Tirukkovil is an excellent specimen of Dravidian architecture, and is the biggest of its kind in Coimbatore district, built by Cholas in 12th century A.D. Its pull is greater due to Lord Siva's mysterious sports played here in the past and it was called Pukkoliur and deemed South Banaras. Saint Sundarar visited this and adored the Lord with his sweet immortal lyrics. The Moolar is locally called Avinasiappan and Mother, Karunambikai. There is a separate niche for Ambikai and it is said that she did penance here.
Accessible by city bus from Coimbatore. It is 20 km off Coimbatore.

171 KODUMUDI - MUCHUKUNDESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This holy place houses three Tirukkovils for the august Trio - Brahma, Vishnu and Siva in its huge campus. All are receiving regular and soulful prayers by the theists and tourists as well. Lord Siva with the local name of Muchukundeswarar and Kodumudinathar and Mother Panpolinayaki is receiving Saivagama puja along with the other deities like Vishnu in the name Ranganathar and Brahma in accordance with the agamas of their own. The sacredness of this temple complex is so high that it heightened the spiritual eminence of Periyar district. Sundaramurti Nayanar visited this place and sang in praise of the Lord. Due to uniqueness of possessing the icons of the highest TRIO, beautifully and fittingly installed, and worshipped, its holiness and popularity are gaining ascendancy over other temples with one principal deity only.

It is accessible by bus and 40 km off Erode. Train facilities also are available as it is the rail head.

172 TIRUMAYAM - SIVAN TIRUKKOVIL

This is an invaluable gift of the Tondaiman ruler of Pudukkotai to the nation, and was built by Vinaya Raghunatha Tevar, the Sethupathi of Ramanathapuram. Its glorious past enriched the pages of both history and legend. On the hill and over high eminence was built a beautiful rock cut Sivan temple, which has been luring thousands of devotees since inception. The temples built atop the hill and at the foot of hill have abundant potentialities for both tourists and theists. Having enjoyed the royal patronage its sculptural wealth is of superior type and enchants all classes of people.

It lies in Tirumayam 19 km off Pudukkotai, commanding all transport facilities.
NARTHAMALAI - VIJAYALAYA TIRUKKOVIL

This ancient Tirukkovil of Siva built in a circular shape by Vijayalaya Chola is a unique gift to Tamil Nadu. Narthamalai was the chief town of the Mutharai rulers and enjoyed the status of capital. It is a standing example of their patronage. Its queer circular shape, though a very common architectural pattern in Kerala, is quite odd and awesome in Tamil Nadu. Its sculptural marvels too are enticing. Another temple of Siva lying in vicinity is called Kadambarimalai and is worth visiting.

This town is 17 km off Pudukkottai and is enjoying all transport facilities.

MAYUVARAM - MAYURANATHASWAMY TIRUKKOVIL

This ancient Mayuranathaswamy Tirukkovil is associated with Mother Parvathi’s worshipping of Siva in the form of Pea - hen, and the Lord performing for the first time the Gauritandava nritya - one of the seven great forms of dance, after their marriage. That sacrosanct scene of action lies here and it now goes by the name of Adi Sabha. It was visited by Brahma, Vishnu and Lakshmi, Manmatha etc., among the celestials, and King Dilipa among humans. Saints like Sambandar and Appar worshipped the Lord and composed hymns in praise of the Lord, and preached that with a mere darshan of this Lord, all sin will be washed away. It has high towers and vast courtyards besides many minishrines for Parivaradevathas. It contains a separate shrine for Mother Parvathi and is worshipped with a local name of Agambikai. Saivagama worship is offered with great fervour. It has big tank outside the tower, but in ruins.

This lies on the national highway between Tanjore and Chidambaram. And it is the taluq Head Quarters town of Myladuthurai taluq of Tanjore district in the state of Tamil Nadu commanding roadways and railways.
VRIDDHACHALAM - VRIDDHAGIRISWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

On the sacred bank of Manimuthar, there is an ancient Tirukkovil dedicated to Lord Siva. It is in heart of Vridhachalam, a flourishing town of South Arcot district. It is fairly a big temple with all the indispensable parts, like the prakara, tower, courtyards, mandapams, garbha griha etc., and is attracting a steady stream of theists. The local names given for Siva is Vridhdagireeswarar and Vriddambigai, for Mother Parvathi. Its vast courtyards and well-sculptural minishrines display its former splendour, and the sports demonstrated by the presiding deity. The great Navalar Sundarar visited and offered lyrical flowers to the Lord. It is said that the Lord blessed the deserving devotees with Panchakshari mantra and they turned divinities. These are two sannidhis for Mother Parvathi called in the local names of Malambikai and Vriddhambikai. It has many donors who endowed several valuable articles and among them a British collector's gift - a grand long chain for the temple chariot deserves mention.

It is a major town in South Arcot district, commanding all transport facilities like train and bus.

TIRUNAGESWARAM - NAGESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This sacred region was called Jambukaranyam, and the Lord was worshipped in the dim past by serpents. Hence the name Nageswarar Tirukkovil. It is here lived King Kulothunga Chola II, and whose court was adorned by the famous Poet Sekkilar, the author of Periapuranam, and he worked as Minister also. It is a big temple with vast courtyards and minishrines. In one of the shrines here in the complex itself Mother Grithatgujambal, another name for Parvathi flanked by Lakshmi and Saraswathi is installed and is luring thousands of devotees. One more niche adorned by Sankanidhi and Padmanidhi is worthy of darsan as they are supposed to bestow liberally wealth
and prosperity on the adorers. There is one more shrine in the second prakara adorned with Budhan, receiving worship every week on a grand scale. The renowned Saiva saint Meyppoul Nayanan also lived here. And the priests claim that this kshetra is one of the Jyotirlinga kshetras too. Their narration with anecdotes convinces the listeners, and they adore with redoubled fervour. As it lies near the very popular Vuppilayappan Tirukkovil, its attraction is all the more great.

It lies 5 km off Kumbhakonam, the temple city and the taluq Head Quarters town of the same name of Thanjore District of Tamil Nadu enjoying all conveyance facilities including town bus.

177 PATTISAM - DHENUPUREESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

Although it is connected with Patti, the descendant of the divine cow Kamadhenu, it is here according to one legend that Mother Parvathi did penance to share the body of Lord Siva. It also enshrines a sacred Sivalinga which rid Sri Rama of the Brahmahtya - killing of Ravana on worshipping soulfully, according to Sthalapurana. Lured by its sanctity, Govinda Dikshit, the Amathysekhar of Thanjore Nayak kings lived here. The archamurti and other icons are specimens of exquisite sculpture. Renovation was carried on to this by Nayak kings, and it received extensive landed property during the period of Chola kings.

According to another legend, Mother Durgambikai housed in the fore of this temple was the household deity of Cholas, who adored her soulfully and were taking decisions before this Mother prior going on military campaigns. After the fall of Cholas this grand, sacred icon was brought here and installed. Legends or no legends, its popularity has never waned, nor the sanctity diminished with the passage of time.

It lies just 7 km off Kumbhakonam, commanding all transport facilities.
DARASURAM - RAJARAJESWARA
UDAYAR TIRUKKOVILOH

This famous ancient Saiva kshetra has etched its memorable name on the pages of history. Its architectural sculpture won wide appreciation. The inner south wall of the first enclosure is adorned with bas reliefs of 108 Saiva saints in a masterly way. The Dwarapalakas of this shrine are brought from Kalyan, the capital of Chalukyas by Chola king after defeating them in the battle. They are a fine specimen of sculpture, and incidentally reflect the patron's glory. Another marvel! The side stones adorning the flight of steps leading to sacrificial altar - Balipitham emit seven distinct sounds as mentioned in Musicology. Moreover, the outer wall of garbha griha is embellished with the carvings of many scenes of Periapuranam. It also contains a niche for Yam - the God of Death. It is indeed a sculptural and spiritual open air museum adorned with rare relics. Though it is almost in ruins, it is luring theists. There is another separate individual temple for Mother Parvathi very near to this spiritual treasure, but lack of maintenance, its due glory is obscured. A standing specimen of hollow modernity swallowing the hallowed antiquity.

It is 5 km off Kumbhakonam, commanding all facilities.

TIRUPURAMBIYAM - SAKSHESWARAR TIRUKKOVILOH

This ancient temple has a long legend and is associated with many Saiva saints and their miraculous powers. It is here the Sunda and Upasunda, the formidable demons obtained rare boons from the Presiding deity - Lord Siva; and to destroy and rid of their atrocities, Devendra sent Tilottama, the court dancer, who by her infinite charms accomplished the Daivakarya. And in this divya Saiva dharitri, once the illustrious Saiva saint Sambandar revived the dead youth at the tearful appeal of an unfortunate young widow. This episode was witnessed
by Lord Siva and blessed all, and hence He was named approximately Saksheeswarar. Its historic importance was attested by the Chola king Kulothunga I. It also witnessed the historic battle fought between Pallava and Pandyan kings; and that scene of action is now called Nattam.

The Vinayaka of this holy place is not made of stone, but of some sea products, which do not stand daily bath; so once a year the idol is given Madhu abhishekan - pouring of honey over it. And it is believed that this august Vinayaka saved the world from Pralaya once, and hence the name Pralayankatha Pillayar. The Vinayakar and Subrahmanya along with Lord Siva are deemed very powerful gods. Unending streams of Duukartis seeking boons visit this place throughout the year and they are relieved of their worries. Devotion never goes unrewarded, nor the gods deviokadiscretionary powers. They only await the visit of ardent asthikas for grant of boons.

It lies 8 km of Kumbhakonam commanding all transport facilities.

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TIRUVIDAIMARUDUR -
MAHALINGESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

As this ancient, famous Saiva kshethra lies between Sri Saila Mallikharjunar to the north, and Sputarjunam, popularly known as Tiruppudaimarudur to the south, it is called Madyarjunam. The Presiding deity, an unusually big Sivalinga is installed on a high pedestal. And hence the appropriate epithet Mahalinga. The temple is sprayed by the holy water of Cauvery flowing in the middle of the town. These factors have given rise to the belief that circumambulation made to this shrine tantamounts to making Pradakshina of the worlds. It blesses the devotees with good health, if they make circumambulations. And this accounts for the throning of the sick always.

Here lies a testimony of Siva's sport demonstrated on this spot in the past - on the inner eastern gopuram there is an image of ghost. It has an exciting legend. Belief is current that a certain Chola king fell victim to a
pisachi for having killed a brahmin by accident. The king tried all means to rid of it, but in vain. At long last, he sought refuge at the feet of this Karunaikasindhu Siva Peruman. He entered the temple through the eastern gate and prayed to the Lord soulfully as advised, and then bade his officers to making an entrance in the western wall for his exit, since it is believed that the evil spirits would not dare enter the garbhagriha of Lord Siva, but only wait at the gate to possess the victims again after their prayer. Done likewise, the wise King was saved. Even to day, visitors after offering prayers do not go back through the passage they enter. They straight away go to the Mother's Sannidhi situated outside the inner prakara and after worship make their exit happily. With many such miracles, the Presiding Lord Siva is receiving the highest veneration from the Bhaktakoti. The royal patronage seems exuding from every inch of this temple. Sculpture beckons and detains even the laymen. Wall panels and images of saints carved on the pillars narrate many awesome stories for mankind to listen and emulate for profit.

This powerful Sivan Tirukkovil adored by countless devotees is very near Kumbhakonam enjoying all transport facilities.

VELLORE - JALAKANTESWARAR
TIRUKKOVIL

Vellore, the head quarters town of North Arcot district has a beautiful fort enshrining among other things a sacred shrine dedicated to Lord Siva, called here Jalakanteswarar. It was built by the Vijayanagara kings in the sixteenth century A.D. It bears ample evidence of Vijayanagar style of architecture. It is profusely ornamented by the exquisite sculpture. The Sivalinga made of a big black well-polished granite looks exceedingly majestic and lifts the souls with a mere look. It is one of the much frequented places of worship and attracts huge crowds everyday, and throughout the year. Its vastness and grandeur are its plus points for attraction.
It lies in Vellore near the Katpadi-Railway Junction and being the district head quarters town, it enjoys all transport facilities.

182 DHARMAPURI - MALLIKARJUNESWARA TIRUKKOVIL

Dharmapuri, the district head quarter's town of the same name once called Taladur was the capital Adigamas, who ruled over Kongunadu comprising the present districts of Salem, Coimbatore and Erode. The town is housing an ancient and largely visited temple, called Mallikarjuneswaraswamy Tirukkovil, popularly known as Kottai Eswaran koil. Though not boasts of high towers, kissing the colourful clouds or occupying tens of acres of land, its glory lies in sanctity of the location and divinity of the archamurtis, going by the names of Mallikarjuneswamy and Kamakshi Amman. Simplicity and modesty are exuding from its construction, and it possesses several minishrines for most of the adorable deities, like Vinayaka, Subrahmanya, Dakshinamurti, Nataraja and Sivakami Amman. The Utsavamurtis are the best specimens of excellent craftsmanship. It got the name of Dharmapuri due to the penance of Dharmangada, the ruler of Kasi, who implemented the direction of one sage, who was doing tapas here sitting in an ant-hill for many centuries. The Kamakshi Amman demonstrated her sports on many occasions and became the safest refuge for the victims of Nemesis. A most visit-worthy shrine.

It lies on the Bangalore - Salem high way, commanding all conveyance facilities from both Salem and Karur on both ends.

183 CHINNAMANUR - POOLANANDESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This sacred shrine is the gift of Rajasimha of Pandyan dynasty and has many legends exuding a unique spiritual aroma, linked up with the history of Kalpavriksha
and Kamadhenu—the wish-yielding celestial objects of great fame. According to legends, the two were cursed to be born as common-place objects by Lord Siva for attending the Dhakshayagna without His presence, though He was the yagnaphalabhotka. Kalpavriksha took its birth in this world as Jack tree, and Kamadhenu an ordinary cow; and was without adoration, muchless recognition until upto the time of a Pandyan ruler who turned a great worshipper of Sivalinga that was found buried under the trunk of that cursed Kalpavriksha. As the sports of the Lord relieved many victims of this area along with the King himself, a big temple was built with a seven tired tower and many minishrines enshrining in addition to parivaraddevathas, two Sivalingas - Poolanandiswara and Kanni Iswara. It has famous thirthas that have divine connections and also the source of the famous Surabhi river. Its puranic name was Harikesarinallur due to the worship made to Sivalinga by Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. It was also called Rajasimheswara Udayar temple. Its fantastic past deserved visitation for the blessings of the archamurtis, who are infinitely merciful.

It lies on the Madurai Cumbum highway, accessible by bus from Madurai, Theni, Bodi etc.

ACHCHARAPAKKAM - SIVAN TIRUKKOVIL

The Sthalapuranra of this little village housing a mighty ancient Siva temple is quite fascinating and publishes to the world that even the highest god also has to reap the consequences of lapses and commissions, regardless of their origin—rising out of forgetfulness or over confidence, or wilful indifference. According to legend, Lord Siva when armed Himself with the services of Brahma, who transformed Himself into a chariot; Vishnu, a formidable weapon and other mighty gods as necessary aids in His preparation for the destruction of Tripura, He forgot to solicit the help of Vinayaka, His own son, but the remover of obstacles in any enterprise taken up by any, at any time. So Vinayaka manoeuvred to stop the
progress of chariot by breaking its axle. The chariot stopped and so Siva’s head drooped. When pondered over the incident, His lapse of not invoking the aid and blessings of Vinayaka flashed across His mind. Forthwith, He propitiated Vinayaka, who whole-heartedly lent his support and the desired sambara of Tripura was accomplished. The axle broke down at this village and it was aptly called Achcharapakkam - the Tamil word means thereby, the place where Achchur i.e. axle was broken. Later a very big Siva temple was built to perpetuate this great episode. The Moolavar is called Paakapureeswarar and Mother Sundaranayaki. It has two garbha grihas. Lord Krishna and Maharshi Goutama adored this Lord. The linga was installed by a Pandyan king.

It lies on the National Highway between Tindivanam and Madhurantakam. And 3 km off Melmaruvathur, commanding bus and train facilities.

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TIRUANJAIKALAM - ANJAIKALATHAPPAN TIRUKKOVII

This Saiva kshetra is blessed with twin gifts i.e. its sanctity emerged from two sources. First, it is the august seat of Lord Siva, going by the name of Anjaikalathappan; second, it is the birth place of Kulasekaralwar, who left indelible imprints on the pages of Bhakti literature. Hence doubly significant. Moreover, the valorous king Cheraman adored the Lord in a unique way and endowed the temple munificently. His icon is installed in the temple along with the famous saiva saint Sundaramurthi Nayanar, who sang in praise of the archamurti and His spouse called here Umai Amman. The utsava murtis of this temple are exceedingly beautiful, that raise the hands of devotees at a mere sight. The temple tank is called Sivagangai thirtham.

It is 37 km off Trichur in Kerala state and from there boat journey for about 4 km takes the bhaktas to the holy feet of Lord Siva.
186 KARUVUR - PASUPATHEESWARA
TIRUKKOVIL

This holy Saiva kshetra is also the birth place of a renowned Nayanar called Eripatha. This is a big temple with vast courtyards and tall towers. The Sivalinga, unlike its counterparts is found slightly leaning to one side. A speciality beckoning keen attention and ardent adoration. Many illustrious bhaktas were libearted by the grace of the Presiding deity and His consort Kripaayaki. And among them Karuvur Devar deserves mention, says the Priest. The temple tank is called Amaravathi.

It lies 72 km of Trichy and accessible by bus.

187 INDRANILA - PASUPAHAR
TIRUKKOVIL

It is one of the five famous saiva kshetras recorded in many legends, the others being, Kedaram, Srisailam, Srikailasam and Arekathangavalam. Tirugnanasambandar adored the Lord and composed verses. Indra worshipped this Mahadev to tide over the menace of demons, who caused insuurnountable troubles to amaravasis. The archamurti is called Nilachalanathar and Mother Parvathi, Nilambikai. It is moderate in dimension, yet contains all the parts like tower, garbha griha etc.

188 TIRUVALANGADU - URDHVA
TANDAVAMURTI TIRUKKOVIL

This is one of the largely visited and devoutly worshipped Sivan kovils of Tondainadu. The archamurti is called Urdhvathandava Murti and Mother Parvathi, Vandarkulali Amman. The temple tank goes by the name of Mukti thiratham. It enshrines one of the five famous sabhas called Ratnasabha, held dear to the Lord and He performed dance with Mother Kali and was witnessed by
Karkotaka and other august personages. It is believed that Karaikkal Amman adored this Lord in a unique way of reaching the sannidhi with legs up and head down. Queer are the ways of expression of devotion, but before that queerest Omnipotent Lord Siva and His mysterious ways, everything else lags behind. And always too. There is a Kali temple near this koil and she is fervently and equally worshipped along with Siva.

It lies about 60 km off Madras and accessible by bus.

TIRUPPASUR - PASURNATHAR TIRUKKOVIIL

This holy temple etched its name on the pages of history. According to local version, the celebrated Chola king by name Karikala was rescued from the wicked manoeuvres of his sworn enemy by this Omnicompassionate Lord. A plot was hatched to kill Karikala without battle - the enemy sent a pot containing a black cobra as gift to the king, which would sting on opening and cause instant death. Lord Siva foiled the attempt by breaking the pot and killing that deadly snake. The grateful king endowed the temple liberally. The Saiva saint Tirunavukkarasu praised the Lord fittingly in immortal verse. The Sivalinga, according to sthalapurana was found under a bamboo tree, and on witnessing the sports of Siva, a big temple was built later by kings and bhaktas.

It is 6 km of Kadambur accessible by bus and train.

TIRUVENPPAKAM - VENPPAKANATHAR TIRUKKOVIIL

Minnal Oli Amman, the goddess and the consort of Lord Siva, the archamurti of the temple here seems out-stepped Her Lord in bestowing grace on the devotees. The sthalapurana says that when Sundaramurti Nayanmar was
groping in the darkness and unable to reach Kanchipuram his destination, Mother Parvathi guided him, appearing as lightning throughout the way. Isn't it akin to the three wisemen of the East who visited the stable to see baby Jesus? Hence the name Minnal Oli Amman. Lord Siva too demonstrated His sports on several occasions and lifted the deserving devotees to their utter dismay but to greatest satisfaction. It is a temple with modest dimensions.

It lies on the National Highway between Satyavedu and Nagalapuram, and accessible by bus.

TIRUVIRKKOLAM - TRIPURANTHAKAR TIRUKKOVIL

Here is a saiva temple with a difference. The glory of this kshetra is that it acts as a barometer to the locals by the change of colour of the Sivalinga adored with great veneration. According to local belief, the object of adoration - Sivalinga locally called Tripurantakar, turns white, indicating heavy down pour, and becomes red predicting an impending calamity. What a boon! And how fortunate are the residents of this holy region! The saiva saint Sambandar poured out his soul in praise of the Lord. The temple tank is called Kupagni and Mother Parvathi, Tripurantaki Ammal. A visit-worthy temple.

It lies 10 km of Kadambattur and accessible by bus and train.

TAKKOLAM - TIRUVURAL TIRUKKOVIL

This holy kshetra besides housing a big Sivalinga, possesses an odd image of huge Nandi, the divine mount of Lord Siva which issues a steady flow of water from its mouth. It is perennial, and so solves the water problem to the locals in a way. Hence the name Tiruvural. The water is feeding the river Vugrakshi flowing near by. The archamurtis - Umapatteeswar and His spouse Umai Ammal
are adored passionately since they are bestowing grace timely on the devout bhaktas. This place was sanctified by the penance of Samvarka mahamuni, the brother of Devaguru Brihaspathi. It is fairly a big temple of with big temple tank called Parvathi Thirtha.

It lies 5 km off Tiruvalam and accessible by bus and train.

TIRUMARPURUR - MANIKANTESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

It is associated with Lord Vishnu's adoration to the archamurti Siva Peruman, who bestowed on Him boons, besides the potent Sudarsana chakra. According to sthalapurana, Vishnu was constrained to release His powerful disc in favour of His saranarthi Kupan, a devout king against Dadhiehi. Alas ! the disc lost its sharpness due to the soul power of Maharshi Dadhichi. So Mahavishnu adored Lord Siva here to get the Sudarsan chakra, He was is possession of, after killing Jalandhara. He prayed to the Lord offering one thousand lotus flowers everyday. Lord Siva put Him to test by hiding a lotus. Finding the number short, Mahavishnu atonce plucked out one of His eyes and substituted it. Pleased with His sincerity, Lord Siva fulfilled His desires along with the much coveted Sudarsan chakra and named Him Padmaksha too. As the Highest Divinity adored Lord Siva and offered His eye too, there is a belief that bhaktas get their desires accomplished even if they worship the Lord for a single moment even. Chandra, the moon-god worshipped the Lord also. Sambandar praised the glory of the Lord in verse. There is a beautiful image of Vishnu in standing posture just opposite to the Moolavar. The local names of the archamurtis are Manikanteswarar and Anjanakshi Ammal. A miss-not-temple for fulfilment of desires.

It lies 4 km of Kancheepuram accessible by bus and taxi.
The fascinating legend of this holy temple is associated with the celebrated saiva saint Tirugnanasambhandar. The sthalapurana narrates that once the saint passionately yearned to see Lord Vishnu in the form of Siva and did penance here. Contented Mahavishnu gave him darsan in Siva's form. The saint in ecstatic joy sang many songs. There are two temple here - one for Lord Vishnu called Odu Vurakeswarar and another for Lord Siva going by the name of Tirunetralinathar. Another shrine laying out side the campus is called Mukteeswar koil and it is equally famous.

This ancient saiva kshetra redolent of HariHara mahima is lying 10 km off Kanchipuram accessible by bus and taxi.

This spiritual treasure house contains three separate shrines built in memory of three demon bhaktas at it. It is a great punya sthala and it fulfilled the desires of the formidable demons called Jalandhara, Onan and Kanthan, the last two being the famous generals of Banasura. As their desires then appeared pious, the Lord granted them then and there and hence He was endearingly called Onakanteeswarar, implying that the demons worshipped here. Sundara Nayanar sang one of his master pieces 'Neyum Palum' ecstatically on his visit here, when there fell at once gold coins from above. Such is the glory of this compassionate Lord. There are three koils - one, for Onan; the second for Kanthan and the last for Jalandar. All are visited with great veneration and they are exceedingly popular.

It lies 10 km off Kancheepuram accessible by bus.
There is a widespread belief that the barren women who worship the Lord Agastheeswarar here with Angapradakshanam beget children invariably. It is an account of this Siva leela, this place is always thronged and Mondays see huge crowds, who begin this Vrata being auspicious. It is believed that Rajendra Chola, son of the celebrated Rajaraja Chola actually witnessed Siva emerging from an ant-hill here to bless the deserving devotees. Devendra also worshipped this Lord for asura samhara many times. The worshipper is believed to be free from fear of untimely death and enjoys sound health, thereafter. The temple tank called Agni thirtha is very powerful and a single bath washes off sins, says the priest. A visit worthy kshetra of great importance. As in the Sivan Tirukkovils, this is also housing all the adorable deities and pujas are conducted according to agamas.

It lies 16 km off Kancheepuram enjoying bus and taxi facilities.

This ancient temple springs many surprises and enshrines in its campus many adorable objects, such as panchabhuta lingas and a queer palm tree combining in itself male and female parts. The Nandi unusually faces east. Legends glorify the place saying that Lord Siva taught Devas and Maharshis the Vedas and hence the archamurti was appropriately called Vedanadeswarar. The temple tank Kalyanakoti is located within in the prakara itself and confers blessings on the bathers. In the vicinity of it lies river Cheyyar. So one has to cross the river by boat to reach the temple.

It lies 31 km off Kanchipuram. Visitors have to necessarily cross the river Cheyyar to adore the Lord.
198 TIRUVERKADU - VEDAPUREESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This kshetra is deemed very ancient and holy. It was called in the past Vada Vedaranyam also. It was here Murkhanayanar, a Siva bhakta of great eminence was born and demonstrated many miracles due to Sivanugrah he obtained. His image is installed behind the Dwarapalakas. There lies a beautiful image of Siva and Parvathi behind the Sivalinga, and it is believed that in the self same forms the Lord gave darsan to Agasthya mahamuni as promised before marrying Parvathi. The renowned saint Tirugnana Sambandar visited and composed lyrics in praise of the Lord. A holy visit-worthy saiva kshetra.

It lies 12 km off Madras accessible by city buses plying regularly.

199 VADA TIRUMALLAIVAYIL - MASALAMANI ESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

The legendary account of this kshetra is elaborately recounted, and it is said that Lord Muruga worshipped Siva here before going to war. Moreover, it is recorded in history that when the valorous emperor Tondaiman, solicited the Lord’s help before going to war, Siva sent His mount Nandi as His deputy. One more unique feature observed here is, there are two Sivalingas, one over the other. At very few places can one see such rarity. Chandana tailabhisheka is offered to the Lord, and it is a hoary tradition honoured with devotion. The saiva saint Sundarar visited and adored with lyrical flowers to the Moolavar.

It is 16 km of Madras and is accessible by city bus or four wheelers.

200 TIRUKKACHUR - VIRUDITTA ESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This holy temple’s Moolavar had the unique honour of feeding His hungry, pious worshipper by begging food
from house to house. The sthalapurana embodies the strange account of Sundaramurti’s tearful appeal to the Lord to provide him food, when he was experiencing keen hunger. The Lord atonce metamorphosed into a Sadhu and went out into the streets with a begging bowl and uttering ‘Bhavathi Bhikshandehi’. He appeased His devotee’s hunger securing food thus. Hence the apt name. What a compassion! Bhaktavasankar undertakes any hardship and takes every form to lift His adorers from the quirmare of misery. Lord Vishnu worshipped this Lord, besides a tortoise once for tiding over its grief. The Sivalinga is small in size, yet mighty in glory, and has been demonstrating miracles timely to the deserving.

It is 3 km off Chengalpattu, accessible by bus. Another Sivaalaya of great name lying at a distance of 6 km off this, is equally visit-worthy and it can be reached by bus.

201 TIRUVAKKARI - CHANDRASEKHARA SWAMI TIRUKKOVIL

Here lies a Sivaalaya in ruins, yet it surprises the visitors with a uniqueness of its own. It has a fantastic legend narrating that the Kali image installed here bears exact resemblance to that of dreadful Kali, who stretched out Her tongue once, during the war with a formidable demon, whose blood, if fell on the ground would produce several demons alike him in power and wickedness. The potent archamurti was adored by Lord Vishnu also. Lord Siva reveals here three faces - one resembling the Moon-god; another Brahma and the last one Vishnu. The temple is very big and possesses temple tank inside the campus. The temple houses all the adorable saivate deities.

It lies 18 km off Pondicherry and accessible by bus.

202 TIRUTHURAIYUR - PASUPATHEESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This holy koil has the special distinction of being visited by several celestials, like Narada, Surya and
celebrated epic personages like Bhima etc. Moreover, it claims the honour of the birth of Santanacharya, the founder of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, who helped Saiva cult spread immensely in the South. This archamurti was so compassionate that He gave darasan to the saint Sundarar, when prayed for soulfully. This is represented on the vimana of the garbha griha. There are two lingas standing for Chandra and Bhima in token of their adoration. Like every Sivan Tirukkovil it enshrines saivite gods.

It lies 8 km off Punroti and accessible by bus.

**203 TIRUATHIGAI - ATHIGAL VIRATESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL**

It is one of the eight Virasthalas and is also considered as the very spot where Tripurasura was burnt to ashes. It is this temple built by Pallava king Mahendra Varma, on realisation of the glory of Saivism through Tirunavkkarasu, whom he subjected to severe tests. Besides, he installed in the temple many trophies brought from Pataliputra on subduing the Magadha king, and they are seen even today. History and legends vie with each other in raising the glory of the temple and sports of the Moolavar - Virateeswar. Its sculptural wealth and architectural beauty deserve visitation for adoration and appreciation.

It lies near Punrouti, at about 2 km distance and accessible by bus.

**204 TIRUVENNINALLUR - TIRUTATKONDA- NATHAR TIRUKKOVIL**

This famous temple was called in the past as Tiruvarthurai. The venerable Saiva pravakta santanaachar lived and dedicated his life to the service of Lord Siva disguised as an old brahmin went to a nearby village at the right time to stop the wedding of Sundarar so as to utilise his services for the propagation of Saiva cult. It
goes by the name of Manam Tavirtha Puttur, an apt one implying the above Sivalila. It is famous in legend and history too. Many devotees were lifted by Lord's mercy and so serves as a beacon light to the hope lost thiests.

It lies 24 km off Punroti and accessible by bus.

**TIRUPENNAGADAM - SUNDARKOLUMBEESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL**

It is a holy kshetra made more sacrosanct by the visitation of celestials like Kamadhenu, Iravatham and apsaras. It was here the father of Maikanda Devar lived and meditated on the Moolavaru. Among the saiva Navalares, Appar visited and sang sweet lyrics in praise of the Lord. It is fairly a big temple with tall towers and spacious halls in addition to several niches for all saivate gods.

It lies 14 km off Vriddhachalam, commanding bus service.

**TIRUCHIPURAM - TIRUCHIPURA-NATHAR TIRUKKOVIL**

The glory of this temple is recorded both in history and legends. Being very ancient, it was lying buried unadorned till about a century and more back much loss unrecognised. The Moolavaru was worshipped by Agasthya mahamuni in the dim past. Later in the Kaliyuga, Tribhuvana chakravarti adored and endowed it liberally. The excavation of the temple was undertaken by one great devotee by name Thambirangal and hence it is also called popularly as Thambirangal sthanam popularly. It is very near to sea - the Bay of Bengal and was a very famous yastrasthala in the past. The temple is very big, but renovation has not yet brought out its former glory.

It lies about 12 km off Kadalur accessible by bus.
KIZHA TIRUMANANJERI - ARULVALLANATHAR TIRUKKOVIL

This famous temple has a fantastic legend that brings out the Omnicompassion of Lord Siva. Once, two ladies hailing from staunch Saiva families became pregnant at the same time. During their chit-chat, they vowed before Siva that their off-springs would be wedded in His presence, if they were of different sex. Alas! One lady delivered a tortoise, whereas the other a charming girl. So the vow was not redeemed; but the tortoise was going regularly to the temple and worshipping the Lord with utmost veneration. Lord Siva pleased with its devotion changed him into a beautiful youth and solemnised the wedding through His sports. This lord was adored by Manmatha also in the beginning. It is fairly a big temple with all accessories and minishrines for parivaradavathas.

It lies 31 km off Tiruvelvikudi accessible by bus.

SIKKAL - VENNAILINGESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

It is a hill temple famous as the holy seat for two august gods - father and son - Siva and Muruga. They are called Vennayclingeswarar and Singaravelar. According to sthalapurana, the celestial wish-yielding cow lived here, and on account of abundant flow of its milk perennially, the entire region turned white with cream and butter covering as crest all over the objects. Maharshi Vasista who visited, the temple made Sivalinga out of that butter and installed it in the temple for worship. Hence the apt name - Vennaelingeswarar. When lifted the linga desiring to instal elsewhere, it could not rise even an inch high. His efforts proved futile and his troubles worried him most. Hence this place was called Sikkal, symbolising his mental anguish. Later, Murugan came and settled down after vanquishing the formidable demon Surapadma. Due to playing of several sports divine, this holy place drew large number of devotees regularly. These two temples are lavishly beautified with
sculptures of supreme craftsmanship and contain beautiful
sculptural adornments.

It lies 5 km of Nagapattanam accessible by bus.

209  SITRAIMUR - PONVAITHA
NADEESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This ancient temple has many fascinating legends. It houses many minishrines in addition to a holy honeycomb receiving regular worship along with the archamurthi Siva everyday. It is believed that renowned Siddhars, changing themselves into honey bees are worshipping the Lord since time immemorial, says the priest. Another legend recounts that once a merchant living here went on business tour, leaving his pregnant wife alone in the house. She was a regular temple visitor, but due to long absence of her husband, there was nothing left in the house to maintain herself; yet she managed to live with her son facing difficulties without grumbling. Taking pity on her, Lord Siva appearing in her dream said that He would keep one gold coin near the portal in the temple every day for her maintenance. He also told another merchant named Ponniral living in next village to look after her and her needs by supplying all the necessaries, taking the gold coin from her. So the place was appropriately called. Five years rolled by then. And her devotion to Lord was waxing day by day. Then came her husband, and finding the grown-up boy with her, he suspected his wife. In order to prove her chastity the Lord altered the positions of sthalavriksha from rear to fore and the place of Nandi from fore to rear with prior information to him about this phenomenon. The erring husband realised his folly and prayed to the Lord more zealously than before.

This lies at a distance of 16 km to Ponnirai town accessible by bus.

210  TIRUKKAICHHINNAM - KAICHHINNA
NATHAR TIRUKKOVIL

This ancient saiva kshetra houses a Prithvi linga made by Devendra. According to sthalapurana, he
worshipped this holy linga passionately for long, and later wanted to transplant it in Amarapuri. But he could neither lift nor shake it. He left it here and went home for public benefit. This august Siva linga bears on its top the finger prints of Devendra. And hence the Lord is called Kaichinna Nathar. It is a big temple with many masterly sculptured images installed in several minishrines. The image of Dhakshinamurthi is a specimen of supreme craftsmanship. There are two thirthas in the vast complex lying in the north and south of the garbhagriha.

It lies 3 km off Tiruvarur and is accessible by bus.

211 TIRUKANDRAPUR - NADUTHERI NATHAR TIRUKKOVIL

This temple has a strange legend and ends with admitting of a Vaishnavite bhakta into the fold of Saivism. According to sthalapurana, one Saivate family was forced by circumstances to get a Vaishnavate groom. As ordained the wedding was solemnised, but the young wife finding no Sivalinga in the house, started offering puja secretly to a wooden peg used to tether the calf, treating as Sivalinga. None in the house was aware of it, except her own husband. Being a staunch Vaishnavate, he smashed the peg with an axe. No sooner did he uproot it, there emerged Sivalinga. Petrified family understood the glory of Siva, who protected His devotee during the period of misery and turned Saivates. The Swayambhu Sivalinga bears on its top the marks of the axe. The temple was built later by the devotees with the liberal endowments by the ruling class. The famous king Idumban worshipped this Lord and made many gifts. It possesses worshipful deities installed in befitting niches.

It lies near Tiruvarur and accessible by bus from it.

212 VEDARANYAM - VEDARANYESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

It is one of the Saptalingeswara kshetras, glorified elaborately both in history and legends. Its eminence is recorded in the Bhakti literature too. In token of saint
Sundaramurti Nayanar's unique eulogy, his image is installed in front of the Sivalinga. The athalapurana embodies that this Moolavar was worshipped by the Vedas, and when the saint-poets like, Tirunavukkarasu, Tirugnanasambandar sang in praise of the Lord, the doors of garbagriha opened of their own accord and facilitated them to get the darshan of the Lord to them. It is fairly a big temple with many niches and minishrines for the most adorable gods, like Durga and Vinayaka etc.

An interesting episode took place here in the dim past. It is said that a rat was swallowing everyday the ghee of the big Kuthuvilakku — brass lamp placed in the garbha griha. One day, the burning wick fell on its nose, and so it shuddered violently. When the frightened rat prayed to the Lord fervently, there emerged from that dyeing wick extraordinary brilliance and illumined the whole Karuvarai with the appearance of Siva, who said that its prayer was so devout and He was pleased to make it a great emperor who would rule the three worlds in its next life. As blessed, the rat was born as Mavali emperor, who in fact became the emperor of the three worlds. Such is the glory of this Lord and hence a steady influx of devotees throughout the year since then.

213 TIRUVADAANAI - ADAANAINATHAR TIRUKKOVIL

The Moolavar of this ancient temple was made of blue diamond and it blessed many heavenly personages like Vaaruni, the son of Rain-God and Surya in the dim past. It is a big temple, and on account of the Sun-god's installation of the Sivalinga, made of diamond, the archamurti is called Adi Ratneswarar. Moreover, He is more popular as Aasanai Nathar, since Vaaruni, the pet son of Varuna, the rain god was relieved of the curse of Durvasa. It is an exciting legend. Once, it is said that Vaaruni incurred the displeasure of Durvasa for an insignificant mischievous act. Being the anger incarnate, Durvasa cursed Vaaruni to turn into an elephant with a goat's head. An abnoxious form and unbearable sight also. That cursed beast
roaming about everywhere for emancipation came here and with this Lord’s mercy got back his former form. Since then He is called the Aadadanai Nathar. It has two holy thirthas situated both in and out of the prakara. A largely visited temple, conducting many festivals on a grand scale.

It lies 34 km off Kalayar koil, another temple town of great fame.

214 KAALAYAR KOIL - KAALAI ESWARAR TIRUUKKOVL

It is an ancient yatrasthala, combining in itself both legendary and historic associations of high eminence. According to sthalapurana, Iravatha, the mount of Devendra worshipped this Lord with great ardour and was relieved of a terrible curse of roaming about in the dense forests as a wild beast. Further, the Lord taking the form of a bull brought Sundaramurthi Nayanar and a famous Chera king to His sannidhi to reveal His form and later demonstrated His sports to the amazement of all. It is a very big temple housing three spacious garbhagrihas - one for Someswara Soundaranayaki Ammal; two, for Kaleeswara Swarnavalli Ammal and the last for Sundareswarar Meenakshi Ammal. The renowned Maruda Pandya rulers endowed the temple munificently. Many valuable things were denoted by rich philanthropists. It is visited largely and worshipped passionately.

It lies 10 km off Nathara, one of the important towns in the Sivagangai district.

215 TIRUAVANIVANALLUR - SAKSHINAYAKES WARAR TIRUUKKOVL

This ancient saiva kshetra has a fascinating tale redolent with Siva mahima. According to sthalapurana, Lord Vishnu in His Varahavatara roamed about proudly after lifting the world from the sea. Finding the arrogance crossing bounds and causing fear to the people, Lord Siva
broke his tusk. Vishnu realising His folly worshipped this Lord zealously for opening His eyes to the realities. Kasyapa Maharshi also worshipped here realising the glory of this Moolavar. Another tale narrates that once a Saivite devotee married the first daughter of the temple priest and went on a pilgrimage. During his absence, his wife lost her eye sight and became deformed beyond recognition in an accident. On returning he claimed the second daughter as his wife rejecting his married spouse. None convinced his obstinate attitude. Then appeared the Lord and in a thundering voice said - “Aval-Ival — that woman is this one only”. All bowed to the Lord and to His verdict. Since then this place is called Aval-Ival Nallur. In a separate shrine, the image of Sakshi Nayakeswarar is installed in token of giving evidence to the erring devotee.

It has a holy temple tank curing the disease, if bathed in as evidenced by blind woman got back the sight lost after a bath as uttered by Lord Siva.

216
TIRUVANJIIYAM - VANJILINGESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This saiva kshetra claims the honour of restoring Mahalakshmi to Vishnu, who left Vaikunta, after Brighu Maharshi’s humiliation of kicking on the chest of Her Lord. In consequence, Vishnu’s plight was too deep for tears, and when He prayed to this Moolavar ripping open His heart, He was blessed with the union of Lakshmi here. In this big temple there are many minishrines, tall gopurams, vast courtyards and holy thirthas. Lord Yama is installed in a separate grand niche. It is deemed equal to Kasi in sanctity and also called one of the Muktidams. Atri Maharshi worshipped here and many more Nayanars also. The temple tank is called Gupta ganga and is supposed to make the bathers sin proof and rid them of the fear of Yama. Huge crowds congregate here for bath during the Karthigai masa.

It is 17 km off Kumbhakonam and accessible by bus.
TIRUKODEESWARAM
PASUPATEESWARAR TIRUKKOYIL

Once Mother Parvathi, due to some tussle over a trifle could not find her Lord in Kailas, who displeased with Her actions disappeared for some time. Unable to bear the pangs of separation, she descended to Bhuloka and started Her search taking the form of a cow. Disappointed in not locating Him, she began ploughing the earth with Her horn to go to Patala. Fortunately, Her horn struck against Sivalinga hidden in this place. Blood came out in profusion at once. Overjoyed at finding Him, she poured milk over the wounded part and it was healed. They were then reunited after an agonised separation. Even now there are some marks of wound on the top of Siva in proof of this episode. It is big temple with all the accessories and an ancient one too, visited regularly by people. Moreover, Kamadhenu, the celestial wish-yielding cow adored this Moolavar, called locally as Pasupatheeswarar and was blessed.

This lies 2 km off Nannilam and accessible by bus.

TIRUCHATTAMANGAI -
AIVANDEESWARAR TIRUKKOYIL

This is a holy kshetra associated with the life of Nayanar NilaNakka - a saiva Bhakta of great fame. The sthalapurana narrates that once a devout bhakta went to the koil with his wife for adoration once. It so happened that an insect fell on the Sivalinga while they were worshipping. At once the pious lady whisked it off with her breath, but, her husband deemed it a sacrilege and admonished her severely there itself in the presence of all. She meekly bore it, as she believed that in no way she desecrated the holy Linga. In the same night, the Nayanar found in the dream Lord Siva showing the same linga with boils and bubble like formations all over except on the part of the top which was blown over by his wife to evict the insect. He regretted his folly and bowed to
the Lord for His compassion in correcting him. The temple housed the images of the couple in token of their piety to the Lord.

It is a much frequented temple accessible by bus from Tirunallaru lying at a distance of 8 km.

219 TIRUMAIGNANAM - BRAHMAPUREES-WARAR TIRUKKOVIL

The sthalapurana of this kshetra embodies an exotic account. The place is reputed for its pure divine waters found in the nearly thirtham called Kasithirtham. As the water has special powers, people visit in large numbers on the auspicious day of Panguni Suklapaksha and take bath during Aswani Nakshatra. Another oddity! And that Kasi thirtha is used only for abhisheka of the Lord during the entire year and so public is forbidden to use it for any purpose. Such is the sanctity of the water. Lord Siva deeming the job of creation most sacred changed Brahma into water before undertaking the onerous task. It was only after making Him thus purest - fit for the job, Brahma was ordained to start creation. The glory of the place, water and the Lord thus defy description. On the Punya divasa of Panguni, people in thousands visit and await that subhagadai. This yatra sthala has a great pull on all classes of people. The temple is vast in dimensions and is enshrining all the adorable icons in proper niches.

It is 2.5 km of Tirukkadavur and is accessible by bus.

220 TIRUVIZHANAGAR - TURAIKATTU VALLALAR TIRUKKOVIL

This old Siva temple is adorned with many sculptural beauties and so detains the visiting bhaktas with its architectural and sculptural splendours. The icon of Muruga is artistically chiselled and leaves an indelible impression on the viewers. Its sthalapurana recounts an exciting
episode that bends the heads of the listeners in veneration. According to legend, one Sivabhakta by name Arulvittan was once carrying a basket of flowers to the Lord. While crossing the rivulet on the way, all on a sudden there came a heavy flood from up stream, and it was about to drag him down the fall. He then soulfully prayed to the Lord clutching the basket tightly, though his life was in great peril. Who else could come to his rescue except that All-benevolent Lord? Lord Siva appeared and saved his life at the right time, in addition to giving Gnanopadesa for blissful life.

It lies 4 km off Mayuvaram commanding bus facilities.

**TIRUTTURUTTI - UTTARA VEDEESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL**

This ancient temple throws a flood of light on Lord Siva’s boundless mercy, besides revealing the power of bhakti. It is mainly associated with the life of Sundaramurti Nayanar, and so his icon is installed in a separate minishrine. According to sthalapurana, Sundaramurti Nayanar broke the promise of not leaving Sangili Natchiar, whom he married for the second time and was going to Tiruvurur. As he did not keep up the word given to Sangili, he lost the vision of both the eyes, besides developing unbearable bodily pains. Though he got back the sight of left eye at Kancheepuram and right eye at Tiruvarur, his physical ailment continued to harass him. But when he visited this holy kahetra and eulogised the glory of the Lord in graceful lyrics, he was removed of his bodily pains once for all. It is said that Lord Siva dwelt here before His marriage and mastered the Vedas by intensive reading. Siva is called Uttara Vedeeswarar since then.

It lies 9 km off Mayuvaram and accessible by bus.

**TIRUNALLUR - KALYANA SUNDARESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL**

The temple’s sthalapurana embodies many exciting episodes occurred here. And there are many concrete evidences of the devotees liberated. Appar and
Tirunavukkarasar visited and composed fine lyrics in praise of the Moolavār. According to legend, one staunch devotee by name Amaranithi Nayanmar, besides offering several prayer services to be Lord gifted to Sivabhaktas many valuable objects. So he was emancipated with his wife and son. Their images are installed in a separate niche. The Moolavār appeared in five colours during different times of the day besides revealing His form to the deserving devotees. The temple Pushkarni lying outside called Saptasagaram is believed to be too powerful and cures the diseases, if bathed. Sage Agasthya was shown the wedding scene of the divine couple, when prayed here. His icon is also installed in a separate niche. Among the festivals celebrated Vaikasi Saptasnanam merits mention.

223 TIRUMUKHESWARAM - PANCHAVARNA NATHAR TIRUKKOVIL

This kshetra has a long legend and is connected with many celestials, like Brahma, Vishnu etc. During the worship of Brahma, the Sivalinga revealed five distinct colours and hence the Lord is aptly called Panchavarna Nathar. The sage Udanka was also blessed with the unique sight of the Sivalinga in five colours. Here occurred once a miracle that shocked one and all gathered - an ordinary cock defeated a big elephant in a fight, and since then this place is called Koliyur. This kshetra was visited by Kasyapa Mahamuni with his wife Kadruva and worshipped the Lord. Among other celebrities who adored the Lord, Karkotaka is found in the Sthalapurana list. It is the birth place of a Saiva bhakta called Chola. And Moovendar also visited and offered prayers. It is big temple with many minishrines for all the adorable deities.

It lies 2 km off Trichy commanding all facilities.

224 KAZHUGUMALAI - VETTUVAR TIRUKKOVIL

Among the many rock-cut temples of Jains at Kazhugumalai, this Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Siva is
beckoning the theists particularly Saivates in large numbers. It is worth visiting, as it lifts the souls by its beautiful Sivalinga and other Saivate gods.

It lies 56 km off Tirunelveli commanding bus service.

TIRUCHENGODU - ARDHANAREESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This hill temple considered as one of the famous seven Sivasthalas in Kongunadu is enshrining the icon of Ardhanareswarar in a grand and modest sized temple atop a hillock, provided with flight of steps. The presiding deity reveals both male and female form in one icon, thereby proving that Sakti stands for energy and Siva for consciousness, and they are equally important and inseparable. This unique type of icon is rare and it is attracting a steady influx of devotees always. The temple contains all the Saivate gods installed in appropriate minishrines, and saivagama worship is offered regularly. The periodical festivals draw huge crowds.

It is accessible from Salem by bus.

TARAMANGALAM - KAILASANATHAR TIRUKKOVIL

The ancient Sivan Tirukkovil enshrines several sculptural marvels. The presiding deity Siva worshipped in His linga form is unusually big and exceedingly grand. The walls are decorated with the carvings of human and animal figures of supreme artistry. The tower is profusely embellished with the enchanting adorable figures of exquisite craftsmanship. Another marvel that strikes the eye is, the stone made lotuses that rotate when moved. Some of the big images, like Yali contain in their mouths rotating stone balls, which are fixed inside but rotate, when moved. Many more fascinating carvings, like tortoise, fish, crocodile on the walls are specimens of exquisite sculptures detain the
visitors long and entertain them with worth-seeing marvels. The life size stone images of Rati and Manmatha, Vali and Sugriva leave a lasting impressions on the visitors.

It lies 24 km off Salem commanding bus services always.

ARAGALUR - SRIKAMESWARAR TIRUKKOVIIL

This ancient temple enshrining a big size Sivalinga goes by the name of Sri Kameswarar and is built on the bank of Vasishta river. This was under the administration of Ekambara Mudaliyar, whose military prowess and indomitable valour crowned him with the honour of imprisoning Chera, Chola and Pandiya kings in his palace, once. A unique glory. Of the two imposing temples built here, the Kameswarar Tirukkovil is famous and its sculptural beauty too is laudable. Another called Karivaradaperumal Kovil is equally famous for its sculpture. Having enjoyed bounteous patronage, it turned out a treasure of architectural sculpture piece that receives a steady stream of devotees throughout the year. Aragalur means in Tamil - village of six trenches and it speaks of its militant nature.

It lies at 4 km of south east Thalaivasal, near Salem enjoying all transport facilities.

SALEM - SUKAVANESWARAR TIRUKKOVIIL

This district head quarters town etched its glory on the pages of history for reasons more than one. The industrial wealth embedded in the surrounding hills; spiritual glory abiding in the good old famous shrines in and around the town, and textile progress it made, are some of the creditable plus points that heightened its glory to the jealousy of other neighbouring districts. The name is derived from the Sanskrit word - Sailam, signifying its location
amidst hills. It was originally called Sugavanapuram due to dwelling of Suga Munivar of great fame. This sage adored the powerful linga called Sugavaneeswarar with great piety here that he was relieved of the curse cast by Brahma.

Many miracles were produced here by the illustrious worshippers including Avvaiyar. At the request of the Chola, Chera and Pandyan kings, it is said Avvaiyar, changed a log of wood into a palmyrah tree. And it bore fruits too. She solemnised the wedding of her adopted daughter here. There is a sculptural representation on the western prakara of the temple depicting Avvaiyar being carried to Kailas by Vinayaka.

Amazing it is to note that there are six famous places in United Kingdom and one in United States bearing the same name of Salem, a shortened form of the holy Jerusalem, the centre of pilgrimage for Christians. This great town boasts of many temples dedicated to several gods, but the Sukavaneswarar's stands supreme for its antiquity and the great pull it is exerting on the theists. The deity enjoys the honour of blessing the devout bhaktas out of proportion of their devotion, and is popular as visible God - Pratyaksha Daivam. It is in the midst of the town, and by its beautiful sculpture and several spiritual activities, it is drawing huge crowds throughout the year.

It is the district head quarters town commanding all types of transport facilities.

229 KANYAKUMARI - SIVAN TIRUKKOVIL.

Kanyakumari, lying at the southern tip of India is gifted with many spiritual treasures and natural marvels, like the seat of the virgin goddess Parvathi, the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Gandhi Smaraka Bhavan besides being the confluence of three seas, the scene of a grand spectacle of sunset and moon rise on full moon days. They are luring a steady influx of sight-seers and god-seekers throughout the year. In addition to these plus points, it is also housing two Siva temples called Guhainatheeswarar and Kasi Viswanathar, where regular
Saivagama pujas are offered daily with great veneration. Of the two, one is an ancient one of modest dimensions, and the other is of recent origin, built for the exclusive use of a religious Matt, but is opened for public to offering prayers. Besides these two, there are many minishrines for Hindu gods and grand churches for Christians. Its cosmopolitan character is exuding in many ways. These Sivan Tirukkovils are lying on the western side of the main road and just in front of Vivekanandapuram, carrying on many humanitarian activities.

It is accessible by all transport means.

230 TIRUMANJERI - SIVAN TIRUKKOVIL

This Saiva kshetra is one of the reputed holy places, where Lord Siva married Parvathi, according to Sthalagna. The belief is current that mental anguish caused by delayed marriages, due to the sins of the past standing in the way of fixation of weddings and abrupt cancellation of alliances take to flight, if prayers to the presiding deities are offered. Here are installed there most worshipful deities - Siva, Parvathi and Ganesh on the same dias. Newly wedded couples, who are relieved from the worries praying on them for years visit this kshetra and express their gratitude through elaborate prayer services. And is always throbbing with the victims of wedding problems. A visit-worthy place. The temple is quite an old one having imposing tower, sturdy prakara and many minishrines.

It lies near Papanasam town on the main road to Kumbhakonam from Chidambaram. And enjoys bus and train conveyances.

231 DINDIGUL - ABHIRAMESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This historic town boasts of many connections with Kings of great fame, who built temples and a big fort on the little hillock lying at the west end of the town. This
beautiful hillock fortified with broad rampart walls was sanctified once by a temple for Mother Abhirami. Now all that spiritual wealth is installed in a grand temple built in the centre of the town. Consequent on its occupation by Tippu, the formidable ruler of Mysore, the archamurti was transferred to the present temple. It possesses a beautiful ancient Sivalinga adored with equal fervour as that of Mother Abhirami. It is visited by thousands of citizens and pilgrims every day. It contains many parivara devatas installed in well-built niches. The town also houses many gods and goddesses in several temples of modern origin and ancient fame also like Jyothiramalinga Swamy, Saneswar Bhagawan, Anjaneya, Kali, MOTHER Adiparasakti etc. And they lie at the foot of the hillock.

It lies in Dindigul town, the district head quarters of Anna district, having all facilities.

232 MAHABALIPURAM - SHORE TEMPLE

This is a typical Pallava temple built in the Dravidian architectural style, and it belongs to eighth century. The inner walls of the Sivan Tirukkovil are adorned with many panels. Among them, the Somaskanda panel tops the list and bears the marks of excellent craftsmanship, together with the patron's adorable refinement. Built on the sea shore and facing east, it enjoyed a glorious past, but unfortunately the impact of tidal waves beating it ceaselessly, corrosion had set in and robbed away its splendour. It is now in ruins, yet the grandeur of construction and majesty of the tower wrings veneration. There is another temple here dedicated to Visnu. Standing against the back drop of vast blue waters of Bay of Bengal, its enchantment keeps the aesthetes for hours with its eyeeful sights. They feel elated at its loveliness and the rhythmic melody of the waves that seem singing in praise of the Lord eternally.

It lies 21 km off Madras and is accessible by buses.
TIRUVANGADU - AGHORA VEERABHADRASWAMY TIRUKKOVIIL

This holy Saiva kshetra in addition to housing a highly renowned Sivalinga is enshrining a ten-foot-high image of Aghoramurti, one of the Panchamurtis of Siva in a separate shrine. It is largely visited and passionately adored. It is a fine piece of sculpture displaying amazing features and dreadful gestures of Siva that strike terror into the minds of viewers. According to legend, it is this form of Siva called Aghora Virabhadrar that killed Viramarthandan, one of the terrible asuras born to Athithi, the wife of Kasyapa maharshi. According to legend, Devas born to another wife called Dithi were always scoring victory over the asuras, their step-brothers. On the advice of Sukracharya, Veera Marthandan, one among the demons did penance and got countless boons from Brahma. Soon he created hell in Bhuloka. The victims - suras and manavas prayed to Siva to put an end to the atrocities of demons. Siva in the aspect of Aghoramurti accomplished their request. It is believed that this event took place here. Hence a grand Tirukkovil.

This lies 3 km off Poompuhar, the erstwhile renowned harbour, where Kovalan and Kannaki lived and brought undying fame to Bharata Khand. It is accessible from Sirkali and Mayuvaram by four wheelers.

UTTAMAR - BHIKSHANADAR TIRUKKOVIIL

This hallowed, ancient Saiva kshetra houses the grand icons of the Triad - Brahma, Vishnu and Siva in separate independent Tirukkovils. Each deity has an exciting legend and is adored with unprecedented zeal. According to legend, the emergence of Siva here was primarily due to annihilation of the arrogance of the sages of Darukavan. With a view to teaching the erring, Vishnu, assumed the
form of Mohini and made them mad after her bewitching beauty. Lord Siva in the form of Bikshandar lured the arrogant munipatnis to fall in love with Him. The sages then performed Adhisara sacrifice to retaliate their attempts, when terrible things, like tiger, a big column of fire, deer, trident, serpent came out from the firepit one after another in succession, and they were directed against Siva. The Lord took each and converted them into His weapons. He changed the tiger’s skin into cloak; made serpents, His kantabharana; and deer, trident, and fire into His mighty weapons. The exasperated sages directed incantations, which the Lord absorbed at once in his Dhamaru. The witless, helpless sages fell prostrate and begged for mercy. This happened here and the Saivate part of the Tirukkovil contains a big Sivalinga and is worshipped with great ardour.

This lies on the Trichy-Musiri road and can be reached by town bus from Tiruchi.

**TIRUCADAVOOR - KALASAMHARA MURTI TIRUKKOVIL**

The well known legend of Markandeya becoming Chiranjeevi with the timely and abundant grace of Lord Siva took its origin here in Tirucadavoor. The sacred linga from which Maheswar emerged to save Markandeya from the yamapasa is popularly known as Amritakanteswarar. It is a well built temple which is luring ardent Siva bhaktas, particularly those who have completed their sixty years of earthly existence to celebrate their Sashtabhadhipuri ceremony with special prayer services to Siva to be blessed with carefree life thence forward.

The Lord is very powerful and confers boons liberally on pious bhaktas. Hence heavy rush. It is one of the 27 Sivan Tirukkovils maintained by Dharmapuram Adhinam. Mother Abhirami, the local name for Parvathi is infinitely merciful and rains boons on her devotees always. The story of Abhirami Bhatta for whom she created the illusion of the full moon on the new moon day can be singled
out for this purpose. The Priest sang exemplify the glory of the MOTHER in melodious lyrics. The ecstatic outbursts go by the name of Abhirami Anthati.

This is a big temple housing all the worshipful Saivite gods in grand niches. The temple Pushkarini is called Amritha Pushkarini and is lying within the prakara, and a bath in it purges of sins particularly on Fridays and Chaitra Pournami. Illustrious Saiva Nayanars like Kungulai kalaya and Kari were born and dwelt here and heightened the glory of this holy kshetra by their ministrations and preachings.

It is 1 km off Mayuvaram Railway Station and accessible by town bus.

236 TIRUVATHIGAI - TRIPURANTHAKAR TIRUKKOVIL

The Sthalapurana of this holy Tirukkovil is quite exciting, as it is this place that presented to Lord Siva two Dwarapalakas and a drum. According to legend the three sons of Tarakasura, on obtaining powerful boons from Lord Brahma built three forts made of gold, silver and iron, one for each. Living happily in these invulnerable forts, they started their atrocious rule, making the mother Earth shiver endlessly. The affected gods along with Bhudevi prayed for Siva's intervention. Moved by their tearful state, Lord Siva burnt the forts to ashes. When the escaped demons applied for mercy, Siva made two of them as his Dwarapalakas and the third his formidable weapon - Dhamaru, adorning His right hand. This Tiruvathigai is built on the bank of river Gadilam. Hence special attraction as a thirtha kshetra for Saivates in particular. Appar visited this kshetra and sang in praise of the glory of the Lord. It is a visit-worthy pilgrim centre. It is fairly a big temple embodying all the adorable Saivite gods in beautiful minishrines. And receiving agamapuja with rituals due.
MATANGIRI GAJA SAMHARAMURTI TIRUKKOVIL

This sacred Saiva kshetra has a fantastic sthalapurana testifying to the belief that Lord Siva killed Gayasuran here and made his skin as His cloak, and has been wearing it since then. The story goes that a powerful demon terrorised the people of this region after getting innumerable boons from Lord Brahma. The victims sought the help of Lord Viswanatha of Banaras. Infuriated at the asurakriyas perpetrated on His bhaktas, He came down forthwith and destroyed him. Vizhuvur is the place where this incident occurred, and there is a Sivan Tirukkovil housing a beautiful bronze image of Lord Siva in the aspect of Gajasamharamurti. In addition to this all the worshipful gods are installed in beautiful minishrines and are adored devoutly.

KURUKKAI - SIVAN TIRUKKOVIL

This legendary Saiva kshetra, where Manmatha was burnt to ashes with the phalanetra of Lord Siva is elaborately eulogised in several puranas and local histories. At the behest of Indra, the Lord of heavens, Manmatha accompanied by his charming spouse Rati descended at this place, when Siva was lost in meditation after Sati’s immolation. And Parvathi was serving Him as advised by her father Himavan. The wedding of Siva with Parvathi for the birth of a valorous son to rid of danavas occasioned the acceptance of Manmatha this formidable act. Manmatha, by releasing his Panchabananas kindled love in Siva. Realising the transgression, Siva opened his third eye and burnt the intruder. Siva thus got the attribute of Kamadahana murti. At the tearful appeal of Rati, Manmatha was given life. That scene of action is called Panchabana Nallur. True to the belief as it were, the soil at the exact spot of action is white in colour, and this place by the name of Vallianallur. This renowned kshetra is surrounded by ever green gardens and there is a tank of crystal clear water just opposite the temple. It is called soola thiratham, said
to be as sacred as the Ganges water. Once, according to
legend, Dirgababu muni, who lived here stretched his long
hands skywards to receive Akasa ganga. Ironical it seemed,
his hands became short. He prayed to Vinayaka, but would
not as his hands too are short. In despair, he knocked
his head against a stone. Then happened the miracle of
the Lord’s hand coming from it to stop bleeding and to
blessing. Thereafter he was aptly called the Kurukkai muni
and the place Kurukkai. Thus this place has more than
one name.

It is 8 km off Nidur and is accessible by bus from
Mailaduthurai in Tanjore district.

239 VIRKUDI - JALANDHARARI SIVAN
TIRUKKOVIL

The ancient Tirukkovil enshrining the Jalandharari
Sivalinga has a fascinating background. It begins with
Indra’s visit to Mount Kailas on some work without prior
appointment. Lord Siva in disguise enquired Indra to give
his credentials. Incensed Indra hurled his Vajrayuda. Siva
broke it into pieces and assumed the form of Rudra to
punish Indra. When begged to be forgiven, he was let off.
But the perspiration that came when He assumed
Rudraswarupa was collected and thrown into sea.

A demon was born out of it and was called
Jalandar. Siva taking affection brought him up. This
Jalandara by his danavakrityas tormented people. At the
instance of the victims, Lord Siva taking the form of an
old man met Jalandara. The arrogant demon heckled at
the tottering figure of Siva. Then Siva drew the diagram
of chakra and challenged Jalandara to remove it from that
place. It was nothing for danava. Being a mayavi, he lifted
it easily. Siva then cut off his head at once. The place of
this episode is now called Virkudi. And there is temple
where Siva is adored

in the name of Jalandarari
- foe of Jaladar. It is a hallowed kshetra visited by bhaktas
regularly.
TIRUVALANJULI - SIVAN
TIRUKKOVIL

This is an ancient Tirukkovil patronised by devout Chola and Vijayanagara kings. The Sivalinga was worshipped by Indra and many sages like Herindar. The Sthalapurana gives a fantastic account of Vinayaka, popular as Swetavainyakar due to the white colour of the image. It is installed in front of the famous Sivan Tirukkovil. This Vinayaka image, it seems, was not given due recognition by gods and so it went without worship. Once when Indra visited to worship the powerful Sivalinga of this place, he found Vinayakar neglected. He decided to take possession and install it in some proper place after his worship of Sivalinga. When he attempted to lift the image later, it could not be. Then there heard an aerial voice bidding him not to change the place, but offering soulful prayer would bring unbounded merit and solace here itself. He then started regular worship and later people followed suit.

Harindar Maharshi is said to have worshipped the Sivalinga and Vinayakar regularly before his disappearing into underground passage through which river Cauvery reached the nether world. But it again reappeared and proceeded to merge in the sea, irrigating the lands on its course for the welfare of Chola rulers, being pleased with their theistic activities and Dharmaraparipalana. Finding it imbued with mystic powers of the deities, the rulers endowed the Tirukkovil in several ways. It lies surrounded by a beautiful garden. The Sivankovil contains all the Saivate gods in grand niches but are falling down due to inadequate attention and renovation.

It lies 5 Km off Kumbhakonam and accessible by town bus.

VAIDEESWARAN KOIL - VAIDEESWARAN
TIRUKKOVIL

The Temple

This holy place sanctified by that humanitarian doctor Vaideswaran - the greatest among the Vaidyas is
enshrining a big size Swyambhu Sivalinga of unprecedented fame. Theist monarchs built many vast mandapams, enclosures, mini-shrines and made it a yatrasthala of great importance. It emerged as an architectural marvel of high order due to the benign touch of royalty. It is quite spacious surrounded by two high sturdy prakarams and four tall towers. And it stands exceedingly majestic, against the back drop of long stretches of green paddy fields and green verdure, it is heightening the beauty of the temple. Its ancient name was Pulirkku veloor, thereby means that Jataya, Rig veda, Murugan and planet Angaraka worshipped this lord with utmost devotion. The Tamil name - pul+irukku+vel+oor is a combination of four words - 'Pul' stands for bird Jatayu; 'Irulkku' for Rigveda; 'Vel' for Murugan and 'Oor' for the planet Angaraka and they worshipped here for getting rid of their anguish. There is a belief current that Angarakadosha takes to heels, if the victims offer ritualistic worship here to the planet. It faces west but the archamurti is facing east.

It has two tanks called Siddhamritha thirtham and Jatayukundam inside the prakara itself. And a bath in them cures all the skin diseases, says the priest. Moreover, the water of the siddhamrit is so sacred that evil spirits possessing women flee at once, if they take bath in it. As the tank is just opposite Mother Parvathi's sannidi, the water, it seems, acquired such miraculous powers of releasing the victims from the paisachika effects, besides curing skin diseases. And look ! it is completely devoid of aquatic animals, like frog, fish or snakes. There are many, mini-shrines housing the august deities, like Vinayaka, Muthukumarar, Balambil popularly called Thayalnayaki etc. It contains many shining bronze statues of deities, like Angaraka, Nataraja, Jatayu, Somaskandhar, Singaravelar, Bikshandanar etc. According to tradition it is here Sri Rama performed the last rites for Jatayu. Moreover, Angaraka, Surya, Sampathi, Jatayu etc., worshipped the Moolavar - Maheswar with great veneration. Hence deemed one of the most visit-worthy places.

Another plus point the temple claims is the holy margosa tree lying at the eastern tower, adoring as it were a well-built dias around. Its thick foliage affords a
pleasant sight to the visitors. It is believed that the green
lustrious leaves chant the name of the Lord perpetually.
The mud of the holy pond and the ashes from the Jatayu
Kundam are mixed up together and made small globules
in front of the Muthukumaraswamy Sannidhi to the
chanting of Sivapanchakshari. Thus made, they gain such
potency that they cure the incurable diseases when
swallowed, says the priest and sells them to the intending
god - minded devotees. Does not mere belief itself relieve
the anguish? Are the ingredients easily available? How
about chanting before Murugan's Sannidhi? Sivalilas
permeate the whole region making it the earthly Kailas
non-pariel.

It lies 35 Km off Chidambaram Tirukkovil enjoying
bus and train facilities.

242 TIRUPPANGUR - SIVAN TIRUKKOVL

It is a Saiva kshetra of great importance. It is the
birth place of a famous Nayanmar called Nandanar, who
being a Panchama fell victim to caste-conscious orthodox
Brahminism. But his piety moved Lord Siva, who bade
the Dwarapalakas to instruct Nandi - His vehicle to move
a little further for the full darsan of His linga to him;
for, he was always adoring, standing in the compound
opposite the Mulavirat surreptitiously -in the absence of high
caste people. It obeyed and that bhakta enjoyed the darsan
for the first time. The Tirukkovil bears testimony to the
many episodes connected with that immortal bhakta and
hence a visit-worthy place. Among them, the pond supposed
to have been dug by that bhakta, single-handed in a single
night is found out side the prakara. Its crystal clear water
attracts the visitors for a bath at a mere sight. Legend
says that he was assisted by Ganapathi during the digging
operations.

Among the uniques to be seen here is the Sivalinga
- it is made of neither stone nor metal. It is an an t-hill
and the priests apply civit every Monday to preserve it
from decay. Sakti is adored in an imposing small shrine.
Many gods, like Brahma, Surya, Chandra, Agni, Indra, sages
like Agasthya, Vyagrapada and Sri Rama along with monarchs and Nayanmars worshipped the Lord here and were blessed by Him. Periapuranam narrates the Lord's sports with many episodes.

It lies 5 km off Vaideswaran Tirukkovil and linked by town bus.

243. SIRKALI - BRAHMAPUREESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

This ancient shrine is an integral part of the popular big Sivan Tirukkovil built to perpetuate great events, visualising the glory of Lord Siva.

SIVA AS A HUNTER

According to tradition, Lord Maha Vishnu after sending Bali Chakravarti to the nether world grew a little bit arrogant and moved about with pride. Not commendable in a way! Does this bring honour to Him? No. It is unbecoming on the part of a person of His status and powers. Apprehending unpleasant consequences, Siva assumed the form of hunter and humbled the pride making Him His target. It worked. Later penitent Vishnu requested the Lord to settle down here and wear the dear skin as mantle and bone as mace in token of the episode occurred; for they symbolize egoism and maya, which were subdued by His arrow. He agreed. So Lord Siva is called Sattanathar - Lord of the skin coat. As this happened here, it was deemed holy, and so a temple was constructed. It is called Brahmmapureeswarar Tirukkovil. By royal patronage, it grew up into a major shrine of great importance. The Chola emperor Vira Rajendra and Venkatadevaraya of Vijayanagara empire diverted huge sums from their treasures to glorify it. It contains in its compound besides this, the famous Tirugnanasambandar's shrine next to Mother Parvathi's shrine. There is one more shrine for Uma Maheswar shrine in the first floor. It too has a long legend.
UMA MAHESWAR SHRINE

The legend narrates - Kalavittu, a virtuous king, who ruled over the country was without issues. He performed several types of pujas and sacrifices for santanaprapti, but to no effect. A certain reputed sage by name Romesa, pitying advised him to go to Kailasa and worship Lord Maheswar. Weighed down by mental anguish, he expressed his inability to do so. Then the sage himself prayed to Lord Maheswar to come down to the south along with Uma devi to bless the king. Maheswar promised that his prayer would be fulfilled shortly. They waited with anxiety.

It was at this juncture Adisesha and Vayu desired to test their might. And according to conditions laid down, “if Wind-god blows off Adisesha, embracing Meruparvatha, he becomes the winner, else Adisesha declares his victory over him”. When the trial of strength commenced, the whole world shook terribly due to the velocity and vitality displayed by the Wind-god to blowing off his opponent, yet Adisesha remained unperturbed. Repetition of the same went on, but none was found tired, nor willing to give up further attempts. Then gods requested Adisesha to lift his head a little as a concession to Vayudeva. When lifted, the Wind-god blew fast with redoubled vigour and force, then a part of Kailas came off and was borne to the south on the sings of twenty big birds. The waiting sages and the king enjoyed the darshan, and forthwith it disappeared. The king had his long pending desire fulfilled. And to mark of this great episode, he built a grand Tirukkovil and installed the images of Uma and Maheswar with figures of birds on the terrace of this sacred Brahmapureeswarar Tirukkovil. The images thus installed are extremely grand and wring veneration by the exquisite sculpture, exuding from them.

THE MAIN TIRUKKOVIL

This Sattanathaswamy temple enshrining a Swayambhu linga lies in the heart of town. The spacious
courtyards housing the three different shrines are enclosed by a high compound wall with four entrances. The principal deities adored are Brahmapureeswar, Tirugnana Sambandar and Tirunilai Nayaki - the local name of Mother Parvati and they are enshrined in three separate shrines each with a prakara and many Mandapams. The beautiful statues of Uma and Maheswar sculptured masterly are installed in a spacious shrine on the terrace. And they are extremely impressive. The image of Sattanathar is installed in a separate narrow niche, and to avail the darshan, one has to go bending head. There is a staircase on the northern side, taking the devotees to the top for darshan. The terrace is called Tiruthonimalai, named for its boatshape and it too has a legend interesting.

It lies 30 km off Chidambaram enjoying bus and train conveniences.

**TANJORE - BRIHADISWARAR TIRUKKOVIL**

It is one of the most holiest and largely visited temples of Tamil Nadu. It is dedicated to Lord Siva, the most compassionate among the Trio of the Hindu gods. It has several names testifying to the enormity of its dimensions and immensity of sanctity. It is called Rajarajeswaram Perivudayar Tirukkovil, Peria Tirukkovil, Adavallan Tirukkovil, the Tanjore Tirukkovil, besides Brihadeeswarar Tirukkovil to mention only a few; all but tell that it is a big temple enshrining a very big linga in it. It is appropriately called the Dhakshina Meru, suggesting thereby its gigantic size, imposing vastness and high tower. Its spectacular appearance and awe-inspiring eminence keep us exclaiming. “Sure, it is not wrought by mortals, but it is the work of superhuman beings”. Credit goes to Rajaraja I, the master builder, whose magnitude of patronage and enormity of expenditure materialised this super monument; mark it, in a very short period of six years only. Another colourful feather to his glittering cap; for the craftsmanship of the sculptor touched the meridian of excellence, and it can be said without any trace of doubt that it is the
touch-stone of Dravidian style of architecture and sculptural arts. And a splendid relic of their genius. Hence the unqualified praise by exert critics like Ferugusson, who said, "It is a perfect gem of carved stone work, the tooling of the stone in the most elaborate patterns, remaining as clear and sharp as the day it left the sculptor's hands". Let us visit and avail the darsan of the deities and sculptural marvels, the temple embodying, one by one.

**THE GREAT NANDI**

As we proceed from the Mahadwar wondering at the gorgeous sights, our march comes to a sudden stop at the unusually big sized statue of Nandi - the divine vehicle of Lord Maheswara. This enormous monolithic black statue measuring 19 1/2 feet in length; 8 1/4 in breadth; 12 feet in height weighs 25 tons. It is installed in a high pavilion right in front of the garbha griha. It indeed stuns and keeps us in silence for a while, by its excellent workmanship, and alerts us later only to guess as to what kind of sumptuous feast the main deity - Sivalinga would soon serve to our eyes. It has an interesting story to tell. This is carved out of a single rock and deemed the second biggest in India, the first being at Lepakshi. As it was growing day after day in all directions imperceptibly due to God's grace, a nail was driven in its back. And lo! the growth stopped abruptly and since then it is remaining stationary.

**THE GREATEST SIVALINGA**

On entering into the sanctum sanctorum, we are greeted by an overwhelming sight. It is the fascinating spectacle of the enormous monolithic black Sivalinga. Understanned, it is biggest of its kind in India and measures 9 feet in height and 23 1/2 feet in circumference. Its extraordinary grandeur is heightened by its superb finish and dazzling surface with glistening polish. It is adorned on the forehead by three rectangular strips of shining silver
with a ruby in the middle, standing for ash marks and vermillion. This remarkable dignified Sivalinga is installed on a high flat dias called Avudayar measuring 54" in circumference and 6 feet in height. The beauty of the ornament on head and white cloth adorning the Linga are beyond description. And according to belief gods worship it at nights in their ethereal forms. On account of its abnormal size and exceptional height, an elevated platform is specially built for the priests to stand and perform archana, harati, abhisheka etc. And more than thirty sacred materials like milk, ash, panner etc. are used for abhisheka. The Sivalinga has many other august names such as Adavallan, Dakshinameruvitankan, Perivudayar etc. It is unique in every respect.

As we stand agape at its stupendous size and ethereal splendour, the sublime figure of Rajaraja Chola I, flashes across our mind and beckons us to offer our soulful prayers for universal progress and perpetual bliss. Instantly we close our eyes and pay obeisance to Lord Siva - the All-merciful. Sure our homage goes to both the builder and the built; for, Rajaraja I equally deserves our respectable gratitude for having created and bequeathed this monumental monument; and Lord Siva for creating such a priceless gem as ruler, who strove for the liberation of mankind by creating an exceptionally enormous outstandingly dignified and structurally perfect sacred Sivalinga that instils pure devotion and commands whole hearted dedication at its mere sight. Before we step out, our lips are tempted to let out involuntarily, HARAHARA MAHADEV testifying to the miraculous change brought out by that living Sivalinga, the sacred manifestation of Sadasiva - the All-merciful. Staunch Saivates feel that they are lifted to Kailas with their mortal frames; for, there is nothing left for their further ambition.

It lies in the heart of Tanjore, the district head quarters town of the same name commanding rail, road facilities round the clock.
MADURAI - SUNDARESWARAR
TIRUKKOVIL

Though the origin of the temple dates back to the Kritayuga, only a temple of modest size existed till seventh century. And it is only in the twelfth century during the reign of Sundararapandyam, its eminence started mounting along with big towers rising to touch the blue sky and culminated only in the Nayaka regime lasted for nearly 200 years. Several philanthropists, particularly Nagarthar families, along with the royalty contributed their mighty mite to making it a temple of unparalleled reputation. The Midas touch of the Nayakas transformed the entire temple complex into a sculptural museum exhibit piece of non-pareil beauty exuding divinity from every inch of this sanctum. The Madurai Meenakshi Tirukkovil says the priest is the first and last word in temple construction of the whole world. Its dimensions and sculpture defy the description.

This independent imposing Tirukkovil forms an integral part of Meenakshi Tirukkovil. The outer prakara is studded with scores of adorable divinities - each is a piece of art and enhances the sanctity of the place. Among them, the huge statues of Saraswathi, Durgai, Siddhar, Lakshmi, Kasi Viswanathar, Lingodbhava Murti, Nayanmars are deservedly famous and paying homage to each is considered a MUST and it brings merit. It also preserves the holy Kadamba tree in addition to having a big yagasala, Kanakasabha and Arukal Peedam, where the Thiruvilayadal Puranam was first recited. Offering obeisance to each Murthi, visitors enter Valliamballam where they greet first Lord Nataraja in the dancing pose to the right side. It is said that Lord Nataraja danced with the right leg at the request of King Rajasekahara Pandya in contravention to the usual practise of left leg. This representation stands an eloquent testimony of Lord's Omni-benevolence. Bhaktavasankar is Bhaktavasankar! Always! And unbeaten too!! Now comes next the garbha griha of Lord Sundareswarar giving darshan in the form of big linga. This holy abode of His is consecrated and supported by 64 bhootaganas, 32 lions and 8 elephants. This august phalas is called by several names such as Chokkanathar, Karpurachokkar, Sundareswarar, Siva, Maheswara, and is adored with great fervour. The visit remains an unforgettable event in life.
This holy place is blessed with several unique features, deserving to be regarded as the principal shrine of the Adhinam; not because of the important decisions about the conduct of prayers services in the 27 Adhinam temples are originated here; nor is it situated in the close proximity to the palatial building, serving as the residential quarters of His Holiness, presiding over the destinies with his office in it; but because of the fact, here lies the Bilva tree under the shade of which flourished the Agasthyasram during the days of H.H. Sri-La-Sri Gurugnanasambandar, the Founder of Adhinam. Secondly it was here Yama, the God of Death worshipped the Lord in expiation of the sin of enrobing the Linga in his vain attempt to take the life of Markandeya at Tirukadavur. Thirdly it is adorned with several rare sculptural pieces in and out of the temple, like the image of Mother Durga revealing in her rare form of sixteen hands. A grand soul-lifting sight that remains locked up in the viewers for ever. And finally this shrine’s architectural excellences, beautified with superb sculptural pieces serve a feast to the eyes.

It contains several minishrines holding the worshipful Saivate gods, like Mother Parvathi, Vinkyaka, Muruga, Dhakshinamurti, Chandikeswarar, Lingodbhava murti, Nandi etc. for the benefit of worship. The craftsmanship of the sculptors with its perfect execution and polish detains the viewers time longer than needed. The archamurti - the black granite linga with its size and decoration enchants the visitors, who involuntarily let out ‘Harahara Mahadev’ at its first sight. On account of efficient supervision and fine maintenance, in addition to the spick and span of the environs in and out of the temple complex, it raises the hands of the bhaktas, as they move round for worship. It serves as the best specimen of supreme dedication and superb upkeep, deserving emulation by all the temples.

It lies in the Adhinam head quarters mansion and accessible by four wheelers from Mailaduthurai commanding all facilities.
The holy Cauvery basin abounds in temples of all kinds, and for all gods too. Particularly in the region of its final course, and before merging into the sea, there are hundreds of temples of great antiquity. In the Tanjore district and around Kumbhakonam, one can find at every 3 kilometres a great kshetra that beckons ardent worship and bath in the river or pushkarini. Their legends are so quite fascinating and fantastic, that the listeners and readers feel at once electrified and decide to make instant trips to them for worship. The Sivalilas, of course, far surpass the sports of other adorable deities. Each place is visit-worthy, and every sport of the Lord, praise-worthy.

Of the temples many lying on the sacred bank of Cauvery, the Thiagarajaswamy Tirukkovil at Tiruvaiyur merits ardent mention and indispensable adoration. It has many plus points. This is the sacred scene of Saptasthanamam, where the annual festival is celebrated on a grand scale in the month of Chitrai; it is here was born Thyagaraja, the world famous saint-musician, who is deemed the most adorable to the vocalists of Karnatak music, for trailing a blaze of non-pareil of eminence on the pages of musicology, it is here Tirunavukkarasar, one of the Saiva Samayacharyas rose up from the holy temple tank, when plunged into a Himalayan pond on his way to Kailas; it is this holy temple visited by many great sages, like Agasty, and who on jumping into this temple Pushkarini reached Kailas; it is this sacred place enjoying the unique honour of being called the Cauvery kottam; and it is in this temple found Japesa Mantapam that witnessed the Bhagavadaaradhana activities throughout the year and finally it is the seat of Thyagarajaswamy, one of the many hallowed names of Lord Siva. This temple is fairly a big one with imposing towers and sturdy prakaras, vast courtyards, and several mini-shrines. The Moolavar is adored with Saivagama rituals with great zeal. In addition to the Sivalinga, the images in standing posture elate and join the hands of the visitors. The eyeful decoration of the archamurtis lift the souls and bends the heads. It contains in its vast compound the sacred Pushkarini of great fame.
This was visited in many luminaries both Saivite and Vaishnave bhaktas since time immemorial.

This is the birth place of Thyagabrahma, the supreme singer among the Trio of the Karnataka music, and his Samadhi lying on the bank of river is regarded as the EL Dorado of the musicians.

It is 15 km off Tanjore enjoying rail and road facilities.

**SUCHINDRAM - STHANAMALAYAPERUMAL TIRUKKOVIL**

This is one of the ancient Tirukkovils with a difference. It acted as an exalted Supreme court that decided many civil cases by subjecting the defaulters to a test of unique type that crowns the truth with total and invincible success and honour never existed anywhere in the world.

The linga is quite unique in possessing the Trimurtis. It is installed in the brightly illumined Garbha Griha. The Moolavar is called Sthananalayaperumal and is about a foot and a half in height and covered with gold Kavacha. The serenity of the spot, divinity of the linga and austerity of the archakas in performing prayer services draw out devotion to the fullest measure from every devotee and they offer soulful prayer with palms joined and eyes closed. Next to this lies another shrine known as Thakkedam dedicated to Sri Maha Vishnu. The states is 7 feet high and covered with dazzling silver kavacham. His consorts Sridevi and Bhudevi are placed in front. The entire sight recalls to the memory of the Balaji vigraha of Tirupathi. Behind this shrine are installed Amarabhoujanga perumal and Suchindrapurumal in separate niches. Indeed there are as many as thirty minishrines inside the prakara and it takes hours to visit them all for worshipping. It becomes quite a rewarding experience to see the paintings on the inner walls of the gopuram. Many episodes that occurred in this place are painted with minute details, and as such they recreate the glory of this divya kshetra. Among the images of the most worshipful gods, the eight-
een-foot-high icon of Anjaneya in standing posture beckons attention and wrings veneration. The sculptural wealth of this place is infinitely great and its craftsmanship is exceedingly superb. Legends are many and it is said that Indra was redeemed of his sin of deceiving Ahalya after penance and prayers to this Lord. Several highest celestials worshipped this Lord on occasions numerous.

It lies 10 km off Nagercoil on the way to Kanyakumari and is accessible by bus and train.

KUMBHAKONAM - ADIKUMBHESWARAR TIRUKKOVIL

It is indeed a marvellous city renowned for commendable catholicity, breathing in diversity and breathing out unity. Look! The strange juxt aposition of Sivan koils and Vishnu shrines interspersed with Sakti temples in the same locality, and in the self same street at it. Its rich past embodies such an admirable spirit of unparalleled universality that it recalls to the mind the sublimity pervading the ancient parnasalas - the abodes of Maharshis, whose taposakti made the wild lionesses suckle mild deers. Sure the religious homogeneity, social amicability and cultural unity that existed there, is beyond the range of words to explicate its uniqueness. Its plus points are many and varied and they encompassed both mortals and immortals whose joint ventures ended in lokakalyana. Among the many visit-worthy places the glory of Mahamaham tank merits mention for veneration. Though scores of world renowned temples are strewn over in and out of the town, only major ones beckon our attention first.

Let us begin with Kumbheswarar Tirukkovil; for the city owes its life and name to Lord Siva. The much-hallowed Sivalingam is in the shape of kumbha - pot, made of Earth mixed with Amit by Brahma Himself on the advice of Lord Siva. Just below this much exalted lingam, the idol of Nataraja is installed. According to periapuranam of Sekkizhar, with the approach the great Deluge - Mahapralaya, Lord Brahma was terribly upset and totally paralysed at the very thought of total destruc-
tion to the universe. And if everything including the seed were to be destroyed, how could the universe be recreated? How to protect the seed? Who could save this? Confounded with this puzzling problem, he approached Lord Siva for solution. Lord Siva then advised him to make a pot with earth and amrit and decorate it with thread before keeping a coconut over the mango leaves and Kusa grass placed on the pot; this sacred Kumbha filled with Amrit to be kept hanging from a net, tied to a tree on the Meru Mountain. It must be worshipped with bilwa leaves. Done this, recreation problem would be solved. Though implemented the direction to the letter, it was carried away by the great flood, and the mango leaves, coconut, kusa grass etc., fell at different places. And they became sacred thirthas later. When Brahma made an intensive search for procuring it, He found the pot at the spot where the present Kumbheswarar Tirukkovil stands.

Then began Lord Siva's part. Assuming the form of hunter, He broke the Kumbha with an arrow. The Amrit that fell from the pot spread out on the ground extending to 10 miles. But at two places it stagnated and became the most sacred thirthas possessing great powers. One was the Mahamaha thirtha and the other Pottramarakkulam. Many thirthas emerged from the places, where drops of Amrit fell. Later a Sivalinga was made out of the broken pieces of the Kumbha, and He installed it at the same place where He found. It is the very same Sivalinga that is adored at Kumbheswarar Tirukkovil today. The place became very famous due to the stopping of Kumbha at this place and it is named after it by the Lord Himself. As Siva, the presiding deity started showering blessings lavishly on his bhakthas, it became one of the premier pilgrimage centres of India. With the passage of time, many more miracles happened in this land, making it all the more popular and famous for granting boons by gods, installed in several temples that came up from time to time.

The Temple Complex

The Kumbheswarar Tirukkovil is situated in the centre of the city. It has four prakarams and scores of
minishrines with big mandapas. The main tower is 128 feet high and it dominates the city by its height and beauty. And it is seen for miles around. The famous Sthalavriksha - Vanni tree is found in the third prakara, which houses a beautiful shrine with a huge icon of Vinayaka. It is locally known as Adi Vinayaka, perhaps for the reason, similar ones in other places came only next to it in point of time. The Tirukkovil contains many worth-seeing sculptural marvels bearing the stamp of Dravidian style. Of them, the Navagraha mandapam treasures up a master piece - a single stone adorned with the carvings of the 27 Nakshatras and 12 Rasis is installed here and it is the biggest draw of this Tirukkovil. Another, the Subrahmanya image with six heads but six hands, and stone cut Nadaswarams - done artistically attract the visitors and receive due veneration. Besides this big temple there are twelve more famous Sivan Tirukkovils, among which Nageswar Tirukkovil, Someswara Tirukkovil, Kasi Viswanathar Tirukkovil, Abhimukeswar Tirukkovil, Goutameswar Tirukkovil and Bhanupureeswar Tirukkovil deserve indispensable visitation.

Let us move to Nageswara Tirukkovil first. It has many plus points, and is attracting devotees more. According to tradition, Adi Sesha - Sri Mahavihnu’s couch and Surya Bhagavan worshipped this presiding deity Nageswarar for getting rid of curses. It is a big Tirukkovil with vast courtyards and many subsidiary shrines. It abounds in many architectural marvels. The stone chariot of Nataraja done artistically can be singled out as the best specimen of the sculptor’s artistry. The construction of the Tirukkovil is so designed that the rays of the Sun enter into the garbha griha through the openings of the tower thrice a year - on 12th, 13th and 14th of Chaitra month and fall right on the lingam. According to legend, it signifies the act of Sun-god’s worshipping the presiding deity. On these three days thousands of people crowd to witness the rare spectacle and enjoying the privilege of seeing Lord Siva along with Surya Bhagawan.

This belief and oddity are on the increase though science quashes off the popular belief as baseless.

It is situated in the vicinity of Mahamaham tank, lying almost in the heart of the city. Around the
Mahamaham tank there are many tirukkovils worthy of visitation.

**SOMESWARAR TIRUKKOVIIL**

The ancient Sivan Tirukkovil faces east and is located next to the famous Sarangapani temple. It contains three Sivalingas - one installed by Kubera, another by Mahavishnu and the principal one by the Moon-god. It is a big temple possessing vast courtyards and several minishrines for parivaradevathas. Due to association with the highest divinities, it is visited by large number of devotees always.

Our third halt is at Kasiviswanathar Tirukkovil.

**KASI VISWANATHAR TIRUKKOVIIL**

It lies on the western side of Mahamaham tank and faces west. Besides enshrining the Sivalinga, it houses seven big size granite beautiful images of river Goddesses like Ganga, Saraswati, Yamuna, Godavari, Thungabhadra, Kaveri and Sarayu in a separate big shrine lying to the north of garbha griha. Their superb sculpture, life size dimensions, standing postures wring veneration. After this the others come one after another. Each temple has an awesome story of its own and was built by royal dynasties spending huge sums. The sculpture, architecture, legend etc. of every shrine lure the theists infinitely. The Abhimukheswar temple facing the Mahamaham tank is said to have been the place, where the coconut placed on the pot was found. It contains several beautiful sculptural pieces that attract the visitors. The Goutameeswar Tirukkovil is just a few thousand metres away to this and this Lord, according to the legend was adored by Goutama Maharshi and was made free from a curse. The Bhanupureeswar Tirukkovil lies at the west end and is equally grand and holy.

All these are located in Kumbhakonam, the Taluq head quarters town of the same name in the Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu commanding rail and road facilities.
PONDICHERRY - VEDAPURISWARAR TEMPLE

In the union territory of Pondicherry, there are many ancient shrines built by Cholas etc., and out of 350 in the entire state, 75 are dedicated to Lord Vinayaka, as he is the favourite and popular god here. Among the Saivite shrines, Vedapuriswar with its Swayambhu linga tops the list. Here regular worship according to Saivagamas is offered and festivals are celebrated with due zeal. The other Sivaalayas like Tirukameswarar temple at Villianur and Panchanadeeswarar temple at Tiruvandal and city temples dedicated to Siva are most visit-worthy. These temples being ancient have all the component parts like prakaras, towers, minishrines etc. built according to sastric injunctions. And so, Siva mahima permeates the whole area and lifts the souls when prayed.

They lie within short distances from Pondy and are accessible by four wheelers.

Famous Siva shrines in

Devalaya is the local name for temple in Karnataka. So used for the following.

HALEBIDU - HOYALESWARA DEVALAYA

This remarkable Hoyaleswara temple considered as the open air museum of sculptural art is a masterpiece of the medieval craftsmen. Eminent critics hailed it as a poem in black stone that brought immortal glory to the patrons first and Hinduism next.

The Hoyaleswara temple is a double shrine. Around it there are seven friezes of extraordinary artistry and they run to a total length of 710 feet. This exterior thus sculptured is more artistic than the interior. Hence the saying, "Look at the inside of the Belur temple and the outside of the Halebidu". Legendary personages and Hindu gods are carved in such realistic forms and adornments,
visitors raise their hands at their sight involuntarily and feel emancipated consciously. That is the glory of the exterior of the main temple. After going round it, which incidentally completes the Pradakshana, the visitors go inside. As the devotees enter, the elaborately carved and elegantly fashioned doorway adorned with splendid lintels with the imposing Dwarapalakas and enchanting damsels bearing fly-whisks on both sides gleam into the sight. The first shrine has a porch with a niche on either side.

Of the two cells, one is dedicated to Hoyaleswara, the deity of Hoyasala dynasty; the other Panchikeswara, but the linga is here called by the additional name of Santaleswara. Hence there are some conjunctions that the builder Ketamalla, with a view to perpetuating the memory of his Lord – Vishnu Vardana and his queen-consort Santala Devi, named the deities after them. Though in ruins, it is drawing a steady stream of tourists and theists, throughout the year.

SRINGERI - VIDYASANKAR DEVALAYA

Sringeri, the seat of Advaita Matapitha justly claims the honour of possessing an ancient sacred Siva Devalaya in the centre of the Sarada pitha campus. Credit goes to Vidyaranya for its construction.

Among the celebrated pontiffs, who held this pitha's banner aloft, Vidyaranya is a multi-faceted diamond, and his tenure has a characteristic aroma that enveloped the whole of Dhakshinapatha and elevated millions of billions of Hindus with the liberal aid from the royal hands of imperial brand, at his behest.

He built a famous shrine called Vidyasankar at Sringeri, through the munificence of Vijayanagara rulers at that time. Its architectural design and spiritual eminence are of unique type that deserve close study.
The Temple Complex

This Vidyasankar shrine is built in the Saradapitha campus itself. It is apsidal in design. There are beautifully sculptured dwarapalakas; the outer walls are adorned with carvings of several puranic personages, depicting the episodes relating to their memorable lives. The archamurthi is Lord Siva and is extremely enchanting with its huge size and adornments. Another object of worship here is the august icon of Sarada made of gold. Sri Vidyaranya installed this golden image of Sarada replacing the sandal wood one set up by Adisankara. Many rulers of fame made rich endowments in the form of jewels, vessels, vahanas, besides donating villages for the upkeep of the Mutt and the Devalaya. The Devalaya's property in the form of jewels made to Mother Sarada alone is a matter of great pride to the Mutt and an object of envy to the several age-old Devalayas. There are enchanting figures of Venugopal and Srinivasa made of ruby and they display the exquisite craftsmanship and munificence of rulers and artistes. Of the four mutts of Sankara, this one has an enviable record of patronage extended by both Hindu and Muslim rulers. The inscriptions narrate rich donations made by the kings, Peshwas and Nawabs and particularly like Hyderali and Tippu who vied with the rulers to donate, endow and aid, whatever the Mutt needed for the propagation of its activities. For Saradopasana, it is the fittest place of inimitable antiquity.

This holy town lies in the district of Chikmangalur of Karnataka enjoying rail and roadways.

MYSORE - MAHABALESWAR TEMPLE ON CHAMUNDI HILL

The lovely hillock - Chamundi Betta lying at about 2 km south east of the fort of Mysore city enshrines some ancient temples of great renown. It etched its glorious image on the pages of both legends and history. In addition to being the holy seat for Mother Chamundeswari, this hill temple possesses many antique Devalayanas, like Mahabaleswar that received liberal endowments by many rulers, like Hoyasalas in the past. It has all the Saivite
goods; like Parvathi, Vinayaka, Subramanya fittingly installed inside. This was built by Hoyasala king Vishnuvardhana in 1128. The Vijayanagar kings beautified these shrines in 1620, and made endowments enough to carrying on the regular prayer services. It was during the regime of Wodeyars, these Devalayats received royal patronage that metamorphosed them into gigantic structures with additions, renovations etc. In 1820 Krishna Raja Wodeyar applied his hands and it was deemed a Midas touch to speak the truth; for a tall tower with enchanting sculpture heightening the glory of the main temple went up piercing into the sky proclaiming, as it were, his munificence. And the new charm emitting from the extentions made is worthy of veneration.

It was the capital of the erstwhile princely state of Mysore. Hence all types of conveyance facilities are available.

NANDI TOWN - BHOGANANDISWARA DEVALAYA

This ancient temple situated at the foot of the Nandi hills near Bangalore belongs to nineth century and it received ample endowments and renovations from time to time by the Chola and Vijayanagara kings. Built in the Dravidian architectural design, its exquisite sculpture and vastness with a beautiful tall Sivalinga in the spacious garbha griha lifts the souls of the theists and tourists as well. There is another temple with a big Sivalinga on the top of the hill, the erstwhile summer resort of royal families luring devotees equally well, who offer soulful prayers during their stay on the hills in summer season. Though modest in size, its antiquity and glory attract theists.

It is a hill station at about 68 km off Bangalore, the Karnataka state capital commanding all transport facilities.
PATTADAKKAL - SANGAMESWARA DEVALAYA

Among the cluster of temples dedicated to Saiva, Vaishnava, Sakteya and Jain gods in Pattadakal, Siva Devalayas form majority. The names such as Virupaksha, Sangameswara, Mallikarjuna refer to only Siva and the architectural grandeur seems vying with rare sculpture that lifts the souls of both theists and tourists. The Chalukyan kings gave a Midas touch to otherwise rugged, shapeless gold-rust sand stone cliffs and converted them into places of worship of great renown. The spiritual wealth exuding from every inch of this unique kshetra is beyond the power of description, though history eulogised it in inane phraseology. The Sangameswara temple is deemed to be the best specimen of the early Chalukyan sculptural art. One can observe a harmonous blend of Rekha Nagara styles.

In these Saiva devalayas Saivagama, worship was offered. At present prayers are offered in Sangameswara and Virupaksha Devalayas regularly with great fervour. It is a gift by Paschima Chalukyas to the nation. It is here their coronation used to be held.

It lies on the bank of Malaprabha and is accessible from Badami town by four wheelers.

AIHOLE - ARDHANAREESWARA DEVALAYA

It is a treasure-trove housing more than hundred temples during the heyday of the eminent rulers. Some of the rock-cut temples enshrining Sivalingas became very famous and attracted thousands of asthikas and paryatakas then. The Ardhanareeswara form of Siva was found very popular here even as early as in the 5th century A.D. The aspidal construction was given supreme importance and the royalty patronised it. In the fort itself there are more
than fifty temples built for all Hindu gods and Jain Thirthankaras. It is with this alone Aihole etched its name on the pages of history.

It is 19 km off Patadakkal from Hunsund town, commanding all transport facilities.

257 GOKARNAM - GOKARNESWAR DEVALAYA

The origin of this great Saiva kshetra dates back to Tretra yuga, when Ravana tried his best to get Atmalinga of Lord Siva to Lanka for the private worship of his Mother Kaikasi, and to making Lanka invulnerable. Though he obtained it by his unsurpassable devotion, he could not bring it home as wished; for, he placed it here disobeying the direction given by Lord Siva and due to manoeuvres of gods. In his trials to pull it out, it assumed the shape of the ear of cow. So the linga was called Gokarna. The archamurthi is popularly called Mahabalanathar and Mother Parvathi, Gokarna Nayaki.

This holy place is associated with Sri Rama and great personages, and they are many thirthas too. It is fairly a big Devalaya with three prakaras and imposing towers. There are many adorable gods in the inner prakara, installed in beautiful niches and grand mandapas. Among the minishrines that attract the visitors, the sannidhi of Mother Tamaragouri deserves first mention. The image besides being a marvellous piece of sculpture, is declaring the glory of the kshetra in an odd way. She is holding in her hand a balance with one pan touching the pedestal and the other up dangling in the air, representig thereby that Gokarna being greater and holier than Kasi is seen lower, and so Kasi, the seat of Lord Siva is up dangling. As the truth comes from Mother Gowri herself, we feel elevated and pay homages for enlightenment. The display of impartiality is worthy of veneration and emulation. As we move further we see many Sivalingas, like Saksheeswara linga, old Baleswara linga, along with beautiful granite statues of Vinayaka, Kumaraswamy etc. The spacious courtyards and mandaps with their architectural beauty fill the eyes and lift the minds. There are many
temples in the vicinity dedicated to Bhadrakali, Balaji, Vitha Vinayaka etc. Though predominantly a Saivakshetra, it has many shrines installed with Vaishnavate icons and are adored with great fervour.

It lies near Kumta and accessible by train, the railway head being Hubli from where journey is to be made by bus or taxis.

258 Nanjangud - Srikanteswara Devalaya

The glory of this Mokshapuri eulogised by Vedavyasa as Galapuri is found in many legends and history, as it begins with the churning of Ksheerasagara by devas and danavas to obtaining nectar. It is here Lord Siva swallowed Halahalam that emerged during the churning to saving the worlds from conflagration. It is here the wedding of Mahalakshmi with Mahavishnu was consummated at the intervention of Lord Siva. Many more awe-inspiring episodes took place here making this Punyabhumi soaked in Siva mahima. Kings and Philanthropists endowed lavishly and made this into a centre of pilgrimage of eternal importance. The Wodeyars of Mysore endowed it in several ways, and Muslim rulers followed suit, recognising the divinity hovering over here. History is replete with many episodes of its many-faceted splendour.

The Temple Complex

The sacred shrine built in the heart of the town measures 385 by 160 feet and faces east. It has an imposing tall tower made in the Dravidian styles. The beautiful, neat courtyard in the fore is quite vast, majestic and is supported by 8 huge well carved, black stone pillars. In the interior there are many cells on the right and left of Navaranga. There are many minishrines inside, containing metal and stone images of several gods of the Hindu Pantheon along with saints. The images of Parvathi, Narayana with His consorts and Lord Subrahmanya seated on peacock, sheltered by seven-hooded serpent are quite attractive and carved are to great perfection. The
archamurthi - Sivalinga in the garbha griha adorned with flowers and jewels lifts the souls and wrings veneration. A sight unforgettable and experience indelible for ever!

The sports of Lord Maheswar are quite thrilling both to Saivates and Vaishnavates. Hence visitation by all. As in the Saivite shrines, here too several types of prayer services are offered. Being the household deity of several lakhs of persons in the State of Karnataka, there is an unending steady influx of pilgrims throughout the year. Tonsorial operation is performed and Orthodox Hindus offer pindas to the manes on the banks of river Kapila flowing nearby. The periodical festivals, particularly Mahasivaratri is the star attraction, when devotees in lakhs congregate and offer several kinds of prayers. Being the premier Saiva shrine with royal patronage, its pull is on the ascent, and the bliss it affords to the visitors is to be only felt than described. A visit pays rich dividends to the regular devotees, besides instant solace to both theists and tourists at the very sight of the holy archamurthi and other adorable deities.

It lies 15 km off Mysore and enjoys all transport facilities.

**TALAKAVERI - VISWANATHA DEVALAYA**

Talakaveri, as the name suggests is the birth place of river Goddess Cauvery, one of the most sacred rivers of India, whose holy life is associated with one of the highest gods, like Brahma, and the illustrious Rajashri Kavera, and finally Agasthya, with whom she was united in wedlock. Taking birth in Mercara, it flows Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, making her entire course auspicious, healthy and wealthy by irrigating lands to raise bumper crops and sumptuous generation of hydro electricity to lighting up the lives of crores of people, lying outside its bounds also. It is the life breath of agriculturists of three states. Its story of birth is quite enchanting, and here at its birth place there is a temple dedicated to Sri Viswanatha.
This shrine resembles the shrines of North Ind and perhaps so, the presiding deity is called Viswanath. In addition to the august Sivalinga, there are more adorable images, like Dandapani, Dundi Vigneswar Kalabhairava, besides Mother Visalakshi, all are wroght in stone at it. They are majestic and soul-lifting, when viewed with due devotion and worshipped soulfully. C account of the assemblage of all these deities here at or place, the kshetra got honorific name of Dakshananakasi.

It is accessible by bus from Bhagamandala, one of the chief towns of Mercara in the state of Karnataka.

260 DHARMASTHALA - SRIMANJUNATHA DEVALAYA

Here is a spiritual treasure of inexhaustible worth that is raising the Mother Bharat to the pinnacle of ineffable glory. This divya kshetra mirrors the most worshipful religious tolerance, and the highest virtues of co-operation and commendable cohabitation. Ironical it may appear that this highest and most adorable Saivate Deity has a Vaishnavate Priest, and to crown as it were, the temple built, developed, and is maintained by a Jain Pithadhipathi. It is justifying its name – Dharmasthala by being the unofficial seat of highest judicature, for adjudicating civil cases, whose verdicts are accepted as divine and all abiding. It has many creditable points, as its emergence itself is imbued with divine mystery.

Dharmashthala temple possesses seven separate temples – one for the Chandranathaswamy, who was worshipped by the venerable Jain Perggades first, and four for the Dharma Daivas, one for Manjunathaswamy and the final one for Annappa, who became instrumental in making this shrine into an All-faith temple of eternal importance and universal adoration. It is befitting then that he too should receive adoration. Hence his presence in a separate shrine. Kuduma, the place once dominated by one temple for Jains, now proudly boasts of having seven, the most veneration-worthy separate temples, catering to the needs of all people.
Of the seven deities worshipped with all paraphernalia, Manjunathaswamy receives Agrapuja. The Sivalinga is about three feet in height and is well adorned with floral decorations in such an enchanting way that it mesmerises the devotees at a single sight. Many commendable traditions are practised for the benefit of all classes of people. A miss not temple of intercontinental fame.

It lies 56 km off Mangalore, the famous city in the South Canara district of Karnataka.

261 UDIPI - CHANDRAMOULEESWARA DEVALAYA

The ancient Chandra Mouleswara Temple lies to the south west of Krishna Mutt and it enshrines a beautiful Sivalinga of about three feet in height. It was originally called Ananteswara. It has a long tale and encircles the life of Parasurama and the great king Ramabhoja. The Temple was then situated in a little village called Shivali, and from this emerged the present cosmopolitan city called Udi. It appears that once, Ramabhoja, while ploughing the land to making it fit for sacrificial ground, a serpent hit by the tip of the plough died on the spot. For expiating the sin, he built four shrines in the four corners of Shivali village. And one more in the centre of the village and worshipped Parasurama in the form of Sivalinga installing it on a silver seat. This legend accounts for the origin of the temple, called Anantheeswara which has another interesting version, emphasising that this place was a Hariharkshetra. Incidentally it traces the purport of Parasurama’s birth too. When the Kshatriyas, the ruling clan abusing the power perpetrated heinous crimes, Lord Maha Vishnu descend as Parasurama to stamp out the unjust sovereignty. He learnt then the art of archery from Lord Siva. Soon after accomplishing the objective Parasurama decided to get himself identified with the Sivalinga. So that both the teacher and the taught would receive prayers jointly and simultaneously by the devotees. He merged in the Sivalinga. And so the Sivalinga
was called Anantheswara — Anantha being one of the names of Mahavishnu. This establishes the cosmic truth that both Siva and Vishnu are one, and justifies the attribute Mahadeva applicable to both Siva and Vishnu. Hence the glorification in Vishnu Sahasranam, mentioning as “Adideevo mahadeevo deeveesoo deevabhrd guruh”.

During the heady of its glory, it was deemed the foremost centre of pilgrimage. With the bounteous, patronage by the renowned kings, it flourished as a centre of Vedantic philosophy and produced many philosophical works. This archamurti of Anantheswar was variously called as Anatapadmanabha and Anantasayana, and they refer to Lord Vishnu since Anantha is one of the attributes of Lord Vishnu. It was called by the name of Anantheswara due to the fact of Lord Vishnu’s taking the form of Sivalinga. This too has an interesting back ground. According to the belief current, the venerable father of Madvacharya worshipped the Sivalinga, seeing in it Lord Vishnu and addressed it as Bhujangasayana. He did penance and availed the darshan of Lord Vishnu, seated on the sesha in his dream. Soon after the birth of son, he installed the idol of Ananthapadmanabha here to commemorate the vision of Lord Vishnu he was blessed with in his dream. It can be adduced that worshipping of Siva and Vishnu in one and the same image was in practice here, since ancient times. This ancient temple contains all the worshipful Saivate deities installed in individual minishrines. And Saivagama puja is conducted regularly with due ardour.

It lies in Udupi, a few yards off Krishna mandir accessible by bus and train.

BANGALORE - KADU MALLESWARASWAMY DEVALAYAM

The metropolitan city of Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka state houses among many places of worship two famous ancient Sivaalayas of great reputation. The Kadu Malleswaraswamy temple lies at the northern end of Malleswaram bus stop, and is visited by ardent devotees regularly. Though not majestic in proportions, or sculptural adornments, it owes its glory to the Lord’s abundant mercy
showered on the pious bhakatas. Another one lying in Seshadripuram too is an old one, but contains all the important parts. Its spacious courtyards are always crowded with devotees signifying God’s popularity and peoples’ faith in HIM. These two are older than Kempegouda, the founder of this famous city. Another one attracting devotees lies in Basavanagudi.

263 KOLAR - NANDEESWARA AALAYAM

Kolar, the district head quarters town of the same name in the state of Karnataka has a spiritual treasure atop a little hill, lying at a distance of about 2 km from the central bus stand. This is an ancient Siva temple of moderate proportions. Its unusual attraction lies in the Nandi, installed on a high mandap in the middle of a big tank. From its mouth there gushes out water perennially and falls into the tank. Deeming it sacred and attributing it to Siva mahima, devotees bathe with great enthusiasm. More than the Sivalinga, the Nandi lures both theists and tourists throughout the year. It is preferred for weekend picnics, so huge crowds seen then.

264 SANGAMA - SANGAMESWAR TEMPLE

At the holy confluence of Cauvery and Arkavati, there lies Sangama a little quiet town famous for an ancient Saiva temple called Sangameswar Devalaya. Its antiquity is its plus point. It is near Mekedatu, an ideal picnic spot attracting huge crowds at weekends and holidays. At Mekedathu the natural rocks on both of the river Cauvery are so closely formed that a goat can leap from one to another gracefully and easily without any fear of slipping into Cauvery. The entire environs with their exquisite colourful scenes lull the visitors filling their ears with the gurgling sounds of river flowing silently in tune with the salubrious breeze flowing from the nearby hills as it were. On account the sumptuous feast the bounteous Nature serves, the Nature lovers, tourists throng this place. Among such joyous people, theists, whose souls hanker for spiritual solace, Sangameswar Devalaya offers a great devo-
tional banquet. Being an old temple, it houses all the worshipful Saivate deities installed in befitting niches. Even fun loving youth and west-faced youth too visit and worship this Lord Siva. And He is conferring boons according to the merit of their involvement in the ritualistic worship.

It is 98 km off Bangalore on the Kanakapura road, accessible by four wheelers.

BADAMI

The ancient capital city of Badami of the illustrious Chalukya kings, brings to memory, the other equally famous two cities like Aihole and Pattadakkal where the sculptural art of supreme quality is kept in captivity, as it were, in the cave walls and temple ceilings. Some of the master-pieces like the 18-armed Nataraja sculptured on the cave walls of Badami is a standing testimony of Chalukyan munificent patronage, and sculptors’ ace craftsmanship. It is revealing 81 dance poses that have neither superiors, much less peers so far. It appears that the patrons converted the gold-dust sand stone cliffs into shining steeples of temples, beckoning attention to the devout men of all sects and cults, including the art critics, who naturally see them through their microscopic eyes. The rich fare it serves to both tourists and theists is beyond the range of words. There are temples and panels for all gods, although Siva in several manifestations like Bhutanatha, Arthanarishwara, Nataraja predominates over other deities and their images.

The ancient name of the place is Vatapi, the name of one obnoxious dreadful demon, who ruled over this region in such contemptuous manner that a holy sage enraged at his atrocities devoured him for the good of the people, according to the legend. In addition to Hindu temples, a fair sprinkling of Jain Mandirs is also observable here, both atop the hill and near the lake called Bhutanatha. To cap as it were, the very Nature made gorge leading to the capital city adorned throughout with temples of unique type is a miss-not fortune, aver the art critics. The whole region of Badami enchants with its haunting Panorama. The Siva temple lying on the other side of
the Bhutanatha lake, houses the beautiful Bhutanatha image of Siva in sitting pose revealing His Roudrarupupa. It is quite impressive. They are many temples dedicated to Vishnu and others. In the vicinity of this holy kshetra at a distance of 5 km, there lies the sculpture gallery housing monumental pieces belonging to Aihole, Pattadakkal and Badami temples. On the way to Pattadakkal, there is the famous Banasankari temple worthy of visitation and adoration.

It lies 163 km off Bijapur, the capital of the renowned Adilsahi rulers enjoying rail and road facilities.

Famous Siva Shrines in Kerala

The regional terms for temple are ‘Ambalam and Kavu. So they are used to give local colour.

TRIVANDRUM - TRIPPAPUR AND TIRUVALLAM SIVA AMBALAMS

In the Anantha Padmanabhaswamy Ambalam, the archamurthi springs a surprise by its huge reclining posture, occupying nearly fifteen feet in length, five feet in circumference, and as such, it has to be viewed from three doors - head from the first door, chest and body from the second, and the rest with broad feet from the third door. It is a unique icon with Brahma seated atop of a lotus rising from His navel. But shock overpowers you, if you learn that when the Lord appeared first to Bilvamangala swamiyar, He was incredibly huge, covering a distance 13 km with head at Tiruvallam, the present suburb of the city and feet at Trippapur, another suburban part lying to the North and South of this august Ambalam of Ananta Padmanabhaswamy located in the heart of Tiruvananthapuram.

The sage being petrified at its unusual length, prayed to reduce Himself into a convenient form to offering regular worship. Finding the appeal reasonable, the Lord shrunk to the present shape. The Swamiji then managed to build a modest sized temple with the aid extended by
philanthropists. Later deeming those two places where His head and feet were found first, suitable temples were built. And there are installed Sivalingas also for public benefit and to conduct daily pujas. Since then devotees are visiting those places and praying with great fervour.

As the two are the integral parts of the great city of Tiruvananthapuram city, buses are available and are plying at regular intervals. So no problem confronts yatri and paryatakas to visit these two miss—not places of great spiritual importance. They avail the darsan of the Lord’s head and feet, in addition to the darsan of Siva also.

CHENGANNUR - MAHADEV AMBALAM

This is a holy ambalam, whose glory is celebrated both in history and legends. It is sanctified by the eternal presence of Siva and Parvathi in a sacred ambalam, built on a vast six-acre land, and deemed one of the biggest of its kind by Kerala standards. It has a massive prakara and a tall three-tiered tower over the Gateway, facing east. Its architectural beauty is of high order and detains the visitors with beauty. Crossing the Mahadwara, when proceeded further, you see the Anakottal -- elephant shed. Next comes Kuttambalam in front of which lies the tall, brass plated flag staff; then Balikalapura leading to the imposing Mukhamantap. Finally the circular Srikoil enshrining the image of Lord Siva in the front, facing the east and Mother Parvathi facing west, just behind, in the same garbagriha at it, but seperated by a wall with passage. This is one of the distinctive features of the temple that marks it out from the rest of the temples found anywhere in India. The roofing covered with copper plates is quite vast and beautiful, sloping steeply downwards. The outer walls, the wooden pillars of Srikoil and the eastern mandapam are adorned with wood carvings, and the craftsmanipship is so exquisite and impressive that Marthanda Varma, the famous builder of Sri Anantha Padmanabhaswamy Ambalam employed all of them for his ambalam after visiting this temple for worship. Their skill is superb and the puranic stories they carved are life-like in expressoins, style and design.
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The Images

The Swamyambulinga of Siva is of three feet in height and wears a forlorn look, recalling his separation from Sati after her immolation in the court of Dhaksha. This linga is adorned with Swarna Kavacha, fashioned into Ardhanareeswara form. It looks extremely beautiful and resplendent that brings the palms of the bhaktas together at a mere single sight.

The image of Parvathi called popularly as Bhagawati was originally a granite one, but it was later replaced by a beautiful two and half a feet high panchaloha vigrah. The Mother is exceedingly beautiful and with her enchanting lotus -- petalled eyes and smiling countenance, she reveals in two hands -- one in Varadamudra gesture and the other Abhaya. Decorated with several invaluable dazzling jewels and resplendent silks, she casts such an enchantment that bhaktas rivet their gaze on her for long. The numerous brass lamps burning bright heighten her loveliness to million fold and make the viewers oblivious of the world for a while. It becomes verily an unforgettable experience to avail the darshan of both Gouri and Shankar in one and the same Srikoil, moreover one behind the other. There are many Upadevathas like Ganesh, Nila-siva, Stalesan and Dharma sasta in different places receiving veneration.

ETTAMANUR - SIVA AMBALAM

This famous ancient Siva Ambalam enshrines one of the very three Sivalingas given to the demon bhakta Khara by Bhaktavasankar. Its legends are as awe-inspiring as the sports of the Lord imbued with inexplicable mystery. The awe-inspiring history of the ambalam dates back to the Treta yuga; and its glory originates from the inexhaustible devotional springs of Khara - a great demon, though served that indomitable and wicked Ravanabrahma, he is a Sivabhakta of an exceptional type. Being a domineering military general with unprecedented commandership, he was entrusted with the rulership of a large territory in Dandakaranya and was related to Ravana through his father. His ardent devotion reached the point of consummation with obtaining several boons from Lord
Siva, propitiated at Chidambaram at the instance of his Preceptor Malayavan.

Among the boons blessed with, three Sivalingas take precedence over others. They were big in size and grand in appearance. For taking them home, he adopted an odd method — carried one in each hand and the third in the mouth. When felt tired on the way, he alighted at the spot, where the Vaikatappan Ambalam stands now. He placed the linga, he was carrying in mouth here and after a while, he lifted it, but failed. He found Vyagrapada Maharshi passing that way, while repenting over the predicament. Realising his spiritual wealth, he entrusted to him the holy work of installing the sacred Sivalinga. Comprehending the divinity of the soil and its environs, he decided to instal one Sivalinga at Ettamanur and the other at Kaduthuruthi. As planned, he did, and made the three places great Siva kshetras of eternal spiritual significance. It has many legends and they raised the eminence of the temple to the pinnacle of glory.

It lies about 15 km of Kottayam, one of the premier cultural centres of Kerala enjoying all transport facilities.

#### VAIKOM - ANANDA PRABHU AMBALAM

It is here, Khara installed the second of the three lingas blessed to him by Lord Maheswar Himself. Several fantastic events occurred here and they drew global attention, due to abuse of powers by the Orthodox Brahmins, who exercised unlimited ill-gotten powers for yugas, but were justly punished when the opportune moment turned up in the early twenties of this century.

The august Sivalinga is quite imposing and measures about 5 feet in height. It is installed on a square shaped, two-foot-high beautiful Vedika. This huge, majestic linga, when adorned with dazzling jewels and colourful garlands, looks extremely beautiful and transports the beholders to Kailas for a while, as it were. The glare of several brass lamps burning bright around adds exceptional grace and heightens its loveliness.
The Lord reveals Himself here in three aspects everyday. During the mornings, He is decorated as Dhakshinamurthi -- the giver of wisdom, and the pujas offered now is called Panthirathi puja. Darsan of this Jnanswarupa makes the adorers wise and sharp-witted. In the noons, He appears in the form of Kirata -- the fabled hunter who tested the might of Arjuna before bestowing Pasupatastra. Those who desire earthly advancement propitiate him with great fervour. Abhishekan of any kind is highly desirable. In the evenings, He gives darsan of Satchidananda. As this form exudes ananda, it is the auspicious moment for submitting long petitions for success of everything. All and sundry throng at this hour. So the temple is always crowded from early morning till late in the evening. As the Lord developed preference for granting liberally all types of boons, the temple has been attracting thousands since the Tretayuga. Moreover, the free meal scheme has virtually converted it into a Dharmasala, and so, the Lord is reverentially addressed as the Anna dana Mahaprabhu.

It lies 15 km off Ettamanur, another Mahadev temple cited and enjoys bus and train facilities.

KOZIKODE TALI -- MAHADEV AMBALAM

This august seat of Lord Siva has a unique literary flavour that has fallen to its lot due to the magnanimous part played by the Zamorins of Calicut, who managed its affairs over many centuries.

The Kozhikode Tali -- the seat of Lord Siva had the proud privilege of extending enormous patronage to the intellectual luminaries, who authored master pieces for the world to profit by. The enlightened Zamorins shone as Zamorins of letters than the Zamorins of petty kingdoms enjoying transitory sway over some square miles of land. Their patronage is second to none. The highly cultured Lords left behind a glittering chapter in the annals of Kerala history, with immortality hugging it fondly gave them an indelible fame. The activity was carried on in the august presence of Lord Siva, who seeing unseen sealed it with approval. Regular literary banquets -- Vidvat sabhas
were held giving opportunities to the men of letters to
demonstrate the peaks scaled by them in the fields of
poetry, theology, drama etc.

The Zamorins, like Janaka Maharshi of Mithila, the
Bhoja of Kalidas days, the Pandyan kings of Sangam period,
the Vijayanagara kings of Bhuvanavijayam times presided
over the Kavyagoshtis, Avadhnakridas etc., to honouring
the learned celebrities by conferring titles and endowing
them with properties. Yearly once, for a week this
intellectual feast was conducted during Tulam and it went
by the dignified name of Revati pattanam. And the Tali
temple was the scene of action and the veritable rendezvous
of all literary activities. Moreover, the sacred shrine had
certain uniques that raised it to the pinnacle of glory. It
spotlights certain feuds existed between the Nambudris --
temple priests and the ruling princes -- Zamorins; it is
this temple that accorded equal importance to Krishna along
with Lord Siva enshrined in an independent ambalam; it
is from these holy shrines meritorious Sanskrit works flowed
and enriched the Vedic wisdom, and this ambalam is
famous for performing Ganapathi homam and Namajapam
every day.

It lies in the heart of the town Kozhikode enjoying
waterways, railways, roadways, being the seaport and a big
town in Kerala.

271 TALIPARAMBA - RAJARAJESWARA
AMBALAM

This ancient temple has the special privilege of
investing imperial powers to Lord Siva and conducting rituals
befitting to the status of emperor of emperors. The
Niradambara smasnavasai Siva blesses the saranagathas in
the most dignified, magnificent manner that stands out
spectacular form the rest of temples. Its legends are
numerous and the splendour of its aura is imperious.

The unique feature of this temple -- it is enshrining
a big size Sivalinga of that compassionate incarnate in the
name of Rajarajeswara and observing rituals befitting His
exalted position. This temple, perhaps to be in tune with
the status of the Lord and justify the honorific title, is putting in practice many of the imperial customs accompanying the majesty of his sovereignty. It is here scholars and literary men of great eminence were honoured as they are done by emperors, the patrons of arts and crafts; besides it is this temple's Lord that tendered Jnanopadesa to Sivayogi; it is to this temple Bhargavarama brought 15000 brahmins for conducting uninterrupted pujas on the line of Agamas; it was this temple's priest who exercised spiritual and secular powers like Mahasamrat at it were; it is this temple sanctified by Sri Rama's visit on his way back home with Sita; it is this place deemed the only holiest spot without cremation ground and hence the fittest to install the Sivalinga given to Mandhata by Lord Siva; and it is this place made sacrosanct with the three lingas given to different bhaktas by Lord Siva on different occasions.

The Mulavirat representing Rajarajeswara in the form of linga is about three feet in height. The decoration, particularly with phalanstra lends ethereal charms and heightens its dignity. The artful expert decoration of making the eyes prominently broad on either side of the well-cut nose heightens the grandeur of the image and gives a royal banquet to the eyes. None takes off his look instantly; but rivets his gaze to enjoy the thrills passing the spines at the grand sight of this Rajarajeswara. The resplendent charms of the Lord linger longer in the minds of the viewers, even after leaving the temple. It beckons visits numerous any prayers multifarious. Indeed it inspired and ignited the slumbering creative instincts in eminent poets too. Thoroughly lost in the enjoyment of rare bliss, the icon of Rajarajeswara radiating from His mesmerising beauty, one Uddanda Sastrig a great poet fell into ecstatic raptures and composed marvellous poems on the spot. His rhapsody reflects the infinite joy he experienced at the sight of that captivating icon. Though this Nirgunopasaka used to stand and see every archamurti in the temple visited, he never either joined his palms nor uttered a single word in praises icons. This Rajarajeswara not only made him raise his hands in veneration, but opened his mouth in composition of verses in his praise. Prostrations to thee O Rajarajeswara for teaching the superioity of
Sagunopasana over Nirgunopasana. His imperial majesty bends the unbendable thus, but never it bent before any. It contains all the component parts of temple like, dwajasthambha, gopura, garbha griha etc., and above all is built amidst Nature’s bounteous green and so attracts the bhaktas most.

It is about 2 km off the bus stand and the railway station of the town of Taliparamba in Kerala.

**272** GURUVAYUR - MAHADEV AMBALAM

Although the sacred icon of Lord Krishna was installed by Guru and Vayu at the instance of Udhava after the nirvana of Krishna Bhagawan at the end of Dwapara yuga, there was dwelling at the end of the lake, Lord Siva with Uma long before this auspicious occasion occurred. There lies now at the very same spot a small and sublime shrine enshrining a Sivalinga, and is visited by an unending streams of devotees. This Saivate shrine lying in the heart of Vaishnava Kahetra reflects the ineffable glory of Siva and his Omnicompassion. Visiting is a MUST and worshipping makes the living holiest, aver the ardent theists.

It is near the famous Krishna temple in the heart of Guruvayur.

**273** TRISSUR - VADAKKUNATHAN AMBALAM

It is a typical Kerala Ambalam with great reputation, and contains in its vast compound several Vaishnavate and Saivate shrines, reflecting thereby its ennobling tolerance and inimitable spirit of accommodation. It has many plus points. Let us enter the Vrishabhachala ambalam complex and visit shrine after shrine for spiritual elevation.

**The Temple Complex**

This supremely unique, chronologically ancient and spiritually important Vadakkunathan holy shrine lies atop
was called Anantheeswara — Anantha being one of the names of Mahavishnu. This establishes the cosmic truth that both Siva and Vishnu are one, and justifies the attribute Mahadeva applicable to both Siva and Vishnu. Hence the glorification in Vishnu Sahasranam, mentioning as “Adideevo mahadeevo deevaeesoo deevabhrd guruh”.

During the heyday of its glory, it was deemed the foremost centre of pilgrimage. With the bounteous, patronage by the renowned kings, it flourished as a centre of Vedantic philosophy and produced many philosophical works. This archamurti of Anantheswar was variously called as Anatapadmanabha and Anantasayana, and they refer to Lord Vishnu since Anantha is one of the attributes of Lord Vishnu. It was called by the name of Anantheeswara due to the fact of Lord Vishnu’s taking the form of Sivalinga. This too has an interesting back ground. According to the belief current, the venerable father of Madvacharya worshipped the Sivalinga, seeing in it Lord Vishnu and addressed it as Bhujangasayana. He did penance and availed the darsan of Lord Vishnu, seated on the sesha in his dream. Soon after the birth of son, he installed the idol of Ananthapadmanabha here to commemorate the vision of Lord Vishnu he was blessed with in his dream. It can be adduced that worshipping of Siva and Vishnu in one and the same image was in practice here, since ancient times. This ancient temple contains all the worshipful Saivate deities installed in individual minishrines. And Saivagama puja is conducted regularly with due ardour.

It lies in Udipi, a few yards off Krishna mandir accessible by bus and train.

**BANGALORE - KADU MALLESWARASWAMY DEVALAYAM**

The metropolitan city of Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka state houses among many places of worship two famous ancient Sivaalayas of great reputation. The Kadu Malleswaraswamy temple lies at the northern end of Malleswaram bus stop, and is visited by ardent devotees regularly. Though not majestic in proportions, or sculptural adornments, it owes its glory to the Lord’s abundant mercy
with Sudarsana Chakra, Sankha, Koumodaka and a fully bloomed Tamara. Abhisheka with oil alone is offered unlike ghee in the Vadakkunathan shrine. The idol laden with colourful garlands and shining gold ornaments appears extremely radiant, lit by the flickering oil lamps around.

In between these two ambalams lies the circular two-storeyed ambalam dedicated to Sri Sankaranarayana facing West. Mural paintings adorning the walls is a novelty of this ambalam. They are quite enchanting and narrate many episodes from the Mahabharatha. Panchagavaya abhisheka is offered to this deity. These three shrines have spacious Mukhamandapams. As the very air is surcharged with the presence of divinities and chants of the priests, it transports every visitor to celestial world for a time. Before leaving these principal ambalams, the devotees fail not visiting the Ganapathi's shrine lying between Vadakkunatham and Sankaranarayana temples. The charming image besides filling the eyes with its diminutive beauty fills the bellies with sweet appams as prasadam to the visitors. The Kshetrapalaka of this ambalam called Vettukkorumakan is installed in a niche in the northern temple. Some Upadevathas are found fixed along the 7-foot wide Pradakshanamarga - the circumambulatory path.

It lies in the centre of Trissur town, the biggest and most reputed cultural centre of Kerala State.

**274 KOTTAYAM - TIRUNAKKARA MAHADEV AMBALAM**

The highly popular Siva Ambalam visited by thousands of citizens of Kottayam and yatris from all parts of India is centrally located in the town of Kottayam. It was built by the royal family of Tekkumkoor, and has an enchanting legend. According to story, the king was an ardent devotee of Vadakkunathan of Trichur and was visiting monthly once, invariably. During his old age, he felt it impossible to withstand the rigour journey, so prostrating before the Lord, and with tear stained eyes he uttered that death would be preferable to living, if his failing health would not permit his further visits to the temple. In the same night, Lord Siva appearing in his
dream consoled him, saying that He would Himself abide in Tirunakkara hill where the present temple stands now.

Later, when some farmers were ploughing the land on the slopes of the hill, their hoe struck against a hard black stone. Along with cracking sound there started red liquid oozing out. On examination it was found to be a Sivalinga and further hoeing threw up the image of a bull, the Siva’s vehicle. Overjoyed king built a grand temple and attributed the miracle to the Siva’s promise in his dream. The linga was duly installed with agamic rites. Regular worship was introduced and the devotional fervour mounted higher and higher as many more miracles occurred in the lives of true devotees. The temple having received the royal patronage was embellished with many wood carvings and beautiful paintings on the walls.

This lies in the Kottayam town — a great cultural centre of the Kerala State. It enjoys all conveyance facilities.

KUDUTHURUTHI - SIVA AMBALAM

It lies between Vaikom on one side and Ettamanur on the other, and is enshrining the third Sivalinga blessed to Khara, the demon devotee by the Lord when satisfied with his penance. This is visited by the Saiva bhaktas along with the others two temples with equal fervour.

Realising the significance of the event and the divinity of the Linga, a befitting shrine, was built by the theist kings and philanthropists, in the past making provision for all the Saivite gods, in addition to vast prakara, tall gopuram, many minishrines etc for the benefit of theists.

TRIPPAKUDAM - SIVA AMBALAM

This ancient Siva Ambalam lies near Vaikom and houses many adorable deities as in other Siva temples. This is a largely visited shrine. Many pious, wealthy theists donated liberally in the past. Among its plus points, it has the golden dwajasthambha reflecting the rich donations made
by bhaktas. The Travancore Maharaja’s patronage took many shapes. It celebrates among other things the Maharaja’s birthday. Appam is the important Naivedyam favoured among other usual items by the Lord.

It lies about 10 km off Vaikom enjoying all transport facilities.

KOTTARAKKARA - SIVA AMBALAM

This famous ambalam dedicated to Siva has many legends. A pious Nambudri of Vaikom temple was advised to worship this archamurthi when bitten by a cobra for cure. When went to offer prayers to the Lord, a black cobra appeared before him to bite, but suddenly a garuda bird descended and tore the serpent to pieces. Would Evil dare to do harm to the devotees? Would that Maheswar allow it in His precincts? The place where the pieces fell are adored by theists. Lord Siva and Parvathi, the presiding deities are extremely compassionate and shower boons liberally. It is a largely visited temple.

It lies in the central Travancore, enjoying all transport facilities from Shenkottai.

ERNAKULAM - ERNAKULATHAPPAN AMBALAM

Ernakulam - one of the premier cities of Kerala, throbbing with commercial activities and maritime culture enshrines an ancient Siva temple called Ernakulathappan Ambalam. This is a heavily crowded and much-frequented Siva mandir that has been emitting Siva mahima in tune with the ringing of temple bells, as it were, since the Dwaparayuga. The temple houses a beautiful, tall, well-sculptured and neatly polished Sivalinga on a high dias over the panavatta and is lifting the souls of the theists at the first sight itself. The temple lying amidst a vast compound contains all the Saivate gods in grand niches Saivagama puja is performed with utmost fervour and thousands of devotees visit everyday. Due to its proximity to Hanuman temple and Sri Raghavendraswamy Aalayam, its
importance is mounting higher, rather it can be presumed, due to its glory those places are thriving beyond expectation. They, rather seem interdependent, and fulfilling the spiritual needs of the people. The legend of the temple is quite fascinating and it has indeed heightened the glory of this Siva kshetra.

It begins with Devala, an asramite of commendable austere life, serving an illustrious sage-seer living on the slopes of the Himalayas. While collecting flowers one day for regular worship, he found a serpent near a bush. Frightened of evil consequences, if left alive, he killed it. The Guru knowing his impetuous act, cursed him. In consequence, his head turned into serpent's hood. So was called Nagarshi. When prayed for mercy with streaming eyes, his Guru said that he would get original form with deep meditation and Siva Panchakshara mantra jap. Nagarshi following the advice went on a pilgrimage to worship Maheswar in several holy places across the country. He was advised in his dream by Lord Siva Himself that he would find a Sivalinga in Bahularanya, the self-same one made by Arjuna out of earth to offer prayers to Him after defeat at His hands in the guise of Kirata. And he would be redeemed at a place where the linga would get stuck up while carrying it. As said, he found it and started carrying it. In a jungle near a seashore tank, he was pelted with stones by boys due to his strange shape. To escape from them, he hid himself in a bush for one full night. In the morning, when he restarted his further pilgrimage, the Linga got stuck up and could not be moved. He decided to lift it with due prayers after bath. He got down into the tank but never came out of it. He reached Kailas with the infinite mercy of Siva, as he was redeemed of his curse. The tank came to be called Rishinagakulam afterwards. The city that developed around the Sivan temple now goes by the name of Ernakulam, the corrupt form of Rishinagakulam - the tank into which Nagarshi entered and disappeared.

It lies in the state of Kerala and one of the big cities having all facilities.
Famous Siva shrines in Goa

IN GOA

GOA - MANGESHI SIVA MANDIR

This portugese settlement despite exuding foreign aroma is housing a few places of worship for all nationals. Among them the Hindu temples, like Santha Durga, Gopalaganapathe, Kalikadevi, deserve mention. Mangeshi temple dedicated to Lord Siva is exerting greater pull than others. For some time, due to the alien rule, this ancient deity took refuge in Priol. The temple is small yet grand with all the component parts of Hindu temple, like the prakara, mini shrines, garbha griha, grand towers and spacious court yards. The entire complex, due to outlandish impact looks like a guradwara or palatial mansion, but when entered into the complex, one greets our Hindu traditional gods and their accommodation according to sastric injunctions. Devout worship, is offered to this deity by its citizens and tourists as well. Festivals and periodical devotional activities are conducted with great zeal commendable. It is in Panaji, the capital of Goa.

NARVEN-BICHOLIM - SRI SAPTAKOTEESSWARA TEMPLE

The Kadamba kings were staunch Saivates and patronised the arts to a commendable degree that deserves instant emulation more than appreciation. Their gigantic temples adorned with superb sculpture and architectural excellences, though built some seven centuries back, are still beckening the attention of the theists and tourists. Despite their external grandeur and magnificence tasted the vagaries of time, their spiritual effulgence is still illumining the paths of the earnest seekers. The Siva temples built at Tambidisurla and Narven-Bicholim are testifying to the rulers' devotional zeal and their care for public zeal.

The famous Saptakotesswara temple is a standing specimen of medieval architectural style and mirrors the rulers' refinement and artistes, superior craftsmanship. It is elegantly beautified with sculptural adornments. It is a big temple with imposing tower, vast courtyards and several mini-shrines for all the premier Saivate gods. The archamurti - Sivalinga is called Dharalinga. Its majesty and glistening polish raises the hands and fills the souls with bliss. It was the favoured deity of the kings.

It lies 37 km off Panaji, the Capital of Goa, and accessible four wheelers.
TAMBIDI SURLA - MAHADEV TEMPLE

During the reign of Kadambas, in the thirteenth century, the Goan territory thrived in all directions due to benign administration of the enlightened rulers. Several temples were built for all the gods of Hindu Pantheon, like Nageswar, Vithal, Santadurga, Mahalaxmi, Ramnath etc. Unfortunately most of them were razed to ground by the aliens, who are aliens to culture and refinement. After more than 400 years of darkness, some of the surviving shrines opened their doors to carry on activities for public benefit.

On account of foreign impact, many temples seem to be putting on a veneer of western civilisation, but deep examination shows, that the core of Hindu culture is remaining untainted. It is immaculate and dynamic.

In the temples renovated or built afresh, as in the past, agamic puja, with all rituals, is being conducted demonstrating that the much adored Hinduism has not lost its vitality, nor has bartered away its glory during the foreign rule. The Mahadev temple at Tambdi Surla where ancient traditions are followed serves as an example to this. It was built first about 700 years back with all the necessary parts, like garbhagriha, mukhamandapa, minishrines etc. Built in the yadava style of architecture, it looks extremely grand. It is visit-worthy temple.

It lies 65 km off Panaji, in the Sangham taluq at the feet of the Western ghats. It is accessible by four wheelers.

FAMOUS SIVA SHRINES IN MAHARASHTRA

AMARAKANTAK – AMARNATH MAHDEV MANDIR

The plateau of Amarkantak, the source of several great rivers like Narmada, Mahanadi and Sona is a holy spot of pilgrimage. It is visited by large number of pilgrims
on their way to, or from Puri in Orissa. The hill of Amarkantak contains many mandirs both for Saiva and Vaishnava gods. There are many kundas for holy bath. The ancient Amarnath Mahadev Mandir is luring theists regularly. It contains Sivalinga and other Saivates gods such as Parvathi, Ganesh, Subrahmanya and Nandi. Sawagama worship is offered here with due fervour.

It lies about 10 Km off Pendra road railway station connecting Bilaspur with Katni. Bus journey can be made from these cities.

283 POONA - PATALESWARA MANDIR

The old city of Poona, now renamed as Pune, the cultural capital of Maharashtra, besides being famous as the seat of administration of several dynasties, has a glittering past, as exemplified by having many monuments that detain the visitors for days. And they recreate spectacular scenes, if visited and tapped at the right source. The visitor feels the Maharaja aroma exuding and hovering over the entire city. It is the birth place of Lokamanya Tilakji, who shaped the destinies of leaders including Bapu. The Pataleswaralayam, said to have been built by Pandavas deserves first mention and indispensible visitation. It is an underground cave temple housing a big size Sivalinga with many cells mostly undorned. As it is not maintained properly, it is not attracting devotees matching its glory. But the beautiful modern mandirs built on the little hill called Parvathi hill, are exercising great fascination and are visited by all regularly. There are many mandirs including Siva also.

It is accessible by taxis and autos, being located in the heart of the city.

284 AMBARNATH - SIVA MANDIR

Ambarnath – a holy Saiva kshetra situated in a lovely valley – a grand colourful spot of the Nature’s enchanting beauty enjoys a pride of place among the centres of pilgrimage in the state of Maharastra. Its plus
points are many, and position, enviable. Its location on the bank of a small river, surrounded by ever green forests, grown sumptuous on the slopes of high hills has an added attraction to nature-lovers more than theists. The vicinity of two famous cities – Bombay and Kalyan, pulsating with industrial population has catapulted its glory to the pinnacle both as a holy place and a picnic spot. To add to these, it is a specimen of the Konkan style of architecture - a fusion of North and South in form. It illustrates the excellences of Hindu sculpture of the 11th century A.D. It is a Shilahara gift to the nation and was built between eighth and ninth centuries. Several royal dynasties like Chalukyas, Shilaharas endowed it in many ways, but alas! it tasted the fury of Portugese. So it has lost its former glory.

Like any Hindu Mandir, it has a garbha griha, porches, pavilions and towers. It faces west. The towers are richly carved and ornamented, lending majesty to the whole construction. The exquisite images carved on pillars, porches and ceilings cast enhancement. The images of Mahishasura Mardini and Kamadeva in dancing poses are the examples of best craftsmanship and the taste of the patrons.

The Swamyambhu linga – the archamurti of this famous temple is about two and half a feet in height and is extremely grand to look at. It is adored as Ambareeswar and during the Mahasivaratri day, its glory touches the zenith. This august Sivalinga resembles the famous Jyotirlinga of Omkareswar at Mandhata in Madhya Pradesh. Inscriptions shed enough light on the builders, and it is concluded that it was built in 1060 A.D. by a Shilahara Mahamandeleswara of the Konkan region of Maharashtra state. It is a visit-worthy shrine that confers bliss munificently and for ever.

It lies in Ambarnath town, near Kalyan in the Tana district of Maharashtra, enjoying transport facilities.
KOLHAPUR - MAHADEV MANDIR

The Mother Mahalakshmi Mandir at Kolhapur is a veritable spiritual treasure house adorned with grand images of almost all gods of Hindu Pantheon in beautiful pavilions in and out of its vast courtyards. Among them, the superbly sculptured icons of Mahakali, Maha Saraswati and Ambabai installed in Mukha mandap are the cynosures of attraction. Next come the much venerated image's of Siddhi Vinayak, Sita Surya, Ramalakshmanan, Tuljabhavani, Dattatreya, Navagrahas for indispensable mention and veneration. All these divinities are found in the ground floor only.

Ascending the second storey, one gets stupefied at the imposing size of a monolithic black Sivalinga installed on a high dias. Its sparkling polish and superb execution wrings veneration involuntarily. The triple ash marks with a big circular vermillion dot in the middle on the broad forehead heightening its splendor casts a spell on the viewers and so they let out Harhar Mahadev sounds unknown to themselves. This spectacle remains locked up in their minds for ever. Ironical it may seem that there are few icons here in the spacious mandir, unlike the ground floor studded to portals with numerous icons. So this mandir can be deemed an individual, independent Mandir - a separate Sivaalaya, though forming an integral part of the Ambabai Aalayam. Hasn't the Lord Mediated and solemnised the wedding of Maha Vishnu with Mahalakshmi at Nanjangud? Would she not accommodate Him fittingly in her abode? So the entire second storey is occupied by HIM and His adherents. It lies in the heart of Kolhapur, in the State of Maharashtra.

MAHABALESWAR - MAHABALEWSAR TEMPLE

Mahabaleswar, the internationally reputed hill resort of Maharashtra, nestling in the Sahyadri range of the western ghats is enshrining a great spiritual treasure worthy of visitation. Apart from its evergreen scenic splendour, heightened by the lovely views of Krishna and Koyna valleys, casting eternal enchantment on tourists; it is housing two ancient Sivaalayas - Mahabaleswar and Atibaleswar for the benefit of theists, who always look upwards for divine inspiration and early emancipation. The summer resort, indeed takes its august name from the holy temple
Mahabaleswar. Saivates, rush to these temples first, despite down with fatigue of mountain journey over zig zag roads with turns and bends at every thousand metres. These temples are well maintained and contain all the Saivate gods, like Ganesh, Kumaran, Mother Parvathi in well-built niches. The Maharastrian customs and traditions greet the eyes even though Saivagama worship is offered. The vast courtyards with sitting arrangements detain the devotees long discussing several Sivalilas after the worship to the worshipful Linga which attracts and wrings their devotion with its fine polish and neat execution. After puja they hasten to watch the exotic view points numbering nearly thirty, like boating on the tranquil clean waters of lake etc.

It lies 120 km off Pune from where four wheelers take the devotees to the hill station.

ELEPHANT CAVES - ROCK CUT SIVA TEMPLE

The state of Maharastra is infinitely blessed with the world renowned Rock cut temples to the envy of many of its counterparts, and for some of the states, rock-cut temple culture is not only new but evokes wonder, as a matter of fact. Besides the well known Ajanta and Ellora, the Elephanta Rock cut Siva temple lying in the Elephant island, 9 km off Bombay, has won such approbation by the foreigners that centuries old shrines too never enjoyed, nor could they dream of it. Is it not due to its vicinity to metropolis and the august scene of political activities of the nation, from where the torch of liberty was first lit?

These temples are situated atop the hill, on the island. Among them, the Maheshmurti shrine in the main cave is exceedingly grand. The mastery of the sculptor wrings veneration. Here Siva is depicted in three roles - Creator, Protector and Destroyer. The sculptured panels adorning the walls are specimens of superb craftsmanship. The TRIO in the panel is given prominent position. The panels illustrate several pouranic episodes with Siva and Parvathi as protagonists. The sculptural excellences and the
vivid portrayal draw out divinity in the viewers and wring veneration more than admiration.

Though the gay folks go there for recreation and relaxation, they invariably visit this and feel their drooping devotion gets rekindled and replenished unknown to themselves. That is the impact of Siva mahima simple and sublime.

This treasure lies on a hill in the Elephant island, 9 km off India gate of Bombay city accessible by steam boat.

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JEJURI - KHANDOBA MANDIR

Jejuri, is one of the premier pilgrim centres of Maharashtra, and occupies a pre-eminent place among the Saivite shrines of our Bharat. Its legendary glory is heightened by the historic importance wrung from the Moghuls by the matchless valour Maharastrian leaders. The presiding deity Khandoba, the local name for Maheswar too asserted and assumed His rudrarupa to drive away the Mlechchas, when they attempted to blow up the fort for looting its incalculable wealth, and descreating it also.

This kshetra claims two independent shrines - one called Karhe pather and the other Gad-kot, lying on the same hill called Jayadri, but separated by only a short distance. It has a fascinating background, and Khandoba’s appearance accomplished the dushtasamhara - killing of Mani and Malla, the formidable demons born out of the remnants of Madhukaitabha asuras, died at the hands of Mahavishnu. Marthandavijaya and Jayadri Mahatya embody elaborate accounts of this Lord and His awesome sports played in the past.

The main temple is a grand specimen of exquisite architecture built with a strong fort, vast court yards, minishrines and proches. The garbhagriha contains two Swayambhu lingas - one for the Lord and the other for Mhalsa His spouse and they are covered with silver maaks. Just above them lie the beautiful images of Lord Khandoba adorned with weapons like Khanda — sword, Damaru, Trisula and bowl. The minishrines also contain several im-
ages of great artistry. In the other shrine lying on the same hill, but at a distance, similar images are found and they are adored with great fervour, according to Maharastrian customs, prominent being the offering of turmeric powder to all male and female deities - a local tradition introduced in commemoration of the advent of the Lord to this place. Many Maharastrian traditions greet the visitors and they are worthy of emulation.

It lies 6 km off Poona the metropolitan city, and the erstwhile capital Maratta empire. It is a railhead enjoying all transport facilities.

**SHOLAPUR - SIDDHESWAR MAṆDIR**

The State of Maharastra is a typical example of a commendable confluence of almost all major cultures, and the seat of grand ancient temples built for all gods, like Vinayaka, Siva, Vishnu, Sakti etc. places like Pandharpur, Tuljapur, Ganagapur, Kolhapur, Sholapur, Jejuri, Alandi and Morgaon have attained global importance, and are beckoning ardent devotees of all creeds and cults. Sivaalayas of Tryambak, Bhimasankar, Omkareswar, Mahabaleswar occupied highest place on the tourist map of India even. Among the lesser important ones, only in points of construction and visitation, the Sholapur Siddheswar temple deserves first mention. Though its pull is comparatively low, its location and divinity exert great influence on the people of state and its neighbourhood. Saivates of all states visit and are being blessed by the Lord.

This Siddheswara holy shrine lies in the centre of the flourishing town of Sholapur and is situated on a higher plinth. Its vast complex studded to its portals with several Saivate gods in grand, well-built minishrines, and a large temple Pushkarini in front of the Archamurti facing east cast enchantment on the visitors. The sublimity of the environs and divinity of the gods detain the visitors longer than their alloted time for visit. Saivagama puja with rituals is offered regularly and the periodical festivals like Sivaratri are celebrated with unparalleled enthusiasm. The modernity exuding from the antiquity of the kshetra
is heightening its importance. It is a miss-not Siva kshetra of perpetual significance.

It lies in the Sholapur town of Maharashtra, commanding rail road facilities.

FAMOUS SIVA SHRINES IN GUJARAT

BHADRAVATHI - MANESWAR CHOKANDA MAHADEV MANDIR

Bhadravathi, an ancient city in the State of Cutch, lying in the North Western tip of India boasts of many temples of renown built by Rajput kings. Though they patronised Jainism amazingly well, and the are ardent followers of Thirthankaras, they built mandirs for Hindu Gods. One among them is Maneswar Chokanda Mahadev Mandir. There are many inscriptions relating to the mandir and they adequately bring out the fame of the mandir. The very fact of the existence of Saivaaradhana in a region dominated by the predominance of Jainism, speaks volumes of the glory of Hinduism. Saivagama puja is performed in this ancient mandir and it is attracting devotees through out the year.

It is in the modern town of Bhadreeswar in Cutch.

ALANDI - SIDDHESWARA MANDIR

Alandi, the seat of Nath Sampradaya enshrining the Jnaneswar Maharaj's samadhi is a small town of unique spiritual significance. It is also a premier centre of Advaita matha and hence turned out a great pilgrim town of all India importance. It contains several objects of veneration that detain the visitors for hours. Among them, Siddheswar mandir takes precedence over others. It is adjacent to the Samadhi of Jnaneswar and forms an integral part of it. The Sivalinga now worshipped has been existing since the
Vedic times. The prayer services offered here follow the Saivaagamas, though Maharashtra customs greet the eyes of the visitors. There is a big size Nandi installed in a beautiful raised mandap and is placed at the entrance. The Sivalinga resembles in size and shape of the Bhimashankar of Sahyadri and receives all types of services as observed in the Siva Mandirs.

It is at 12 Km distance off Pune and is accessible by city bus.

292 **VADNAGAR - HATAKESWAR MAHADEV MANDIR**

This ancient Hatakeswara Saiva Kshetra of Gujarat situated in Vadnagar city has a very long legend and dates back to Vedic times. It is said to have covered five crosas during its heyday. Vadnagar has another name of Chamatkarapur, and history embodies its glory extensively. The Brahmins of this place were called Nagar Brahmins, highly erudite and are responsible for the introduction of Nagari lipi.

The legend of this kshetra is quite fantastic and encircles many celestials. According to it, Lord Siva turned desolate after Sati's immolation at Dakshayagna, particularly after cutting of her body by the Sudarsana Chakra of Sri Mahavishnu and was roaming about like a lunatic almost naked in the country of Anartha. Rishis dwelling there found this indecent and unbearable. So they cursed him. In consequence, the Sivalinga worshipped there hitherto at once went down to Patala. At the instance of Brahma, Siva received back the Sivalinga given once to the hermits on ardent prayers. Brahma then substituted a golden Sivalinga - Hataka linga at their earnest request, on realising their folly. And it was called Hatakeswara linga later. Chitra Sarma, a brahmin renowned for his scholarship living at Chamatkarapur was greatly attracted to this linga and prayed regularly with unprecedented fervour. At his humble plea, Siva allowed him introducing the Hatakeswaropasana in Vadnagar. Soon 68 temples were built by devout Saivates and gradually Sivopasana became very
popular and the Kashetra attracted a steady influx of devotees.

Later, a sage Mankana name came to this place and performed penance. Due to efficacy of his tapas, vegetable juice started flowing from his hand. Odd isn’t it? It elated the sage, but he turned conceited, and started dancing. Siva, pleased with it descended and blessed him. As this place pleased Siva most, He said that it would be called Anandapur and He would stay permanently in the name of Anandeswar. A mandir was built to install Him. The Sivalinga thus found here is luring unending streams of Bhaktas throughout the year.

It lies near Vijnagar in the state of Gujarat.

293 SURAT - MORESWARA MAHADEV MANDIR

The city of Surat enjoys a high reputation of enshrining scores of ancient temples dedicated to supreme deities, like Balaji, Ambaji, Kalikamata, Ramanath, Hanuman, Mahaviraswami, Paraswanath etc. In addition to these hoary mandirs, there are two mandirs dedicated to Siva. The Kasi Viswanath temple lying on the Balaji Road and Muleswara or Moreswara Mahadev Mandir situated in Gopipura are deservedly famous and are attracting devout Saivates and theists throughout the year. These two are built under ground, yet possess all the parivaradevatas for conducting prayer services according to agama sastras. These mandirs enshrine Sivalingas in addition to the icons of Lord Maheswar made of marble.

Being very ancient, renovations were carried out several times, so they embody many modern trends, yet aradhana rituals remain same and hence the hovering of Saivism over the entire area. They are visit-worthy.

Surat is a harbour town of Gujarat and is accessible by air, road and railways.
SIDDHAPUR - RUDRA MAHA MANDIR

The Solanki dynasty of Rajputs were staunch Saivites and liberally endowed to the existing ancient temples, besides building new ones of gigantic proportions with unprecedented architectural embellishments and sculptural beauties. Among them the Rudramahadev mandir can be singled out in proof of their bounteous patronage. It was in 944 A.D. the construction was started, but the Sivalinga was installed, during the reign of Mularaj. It took nearly 175 years to get its final shape, as it was conceived on a large scale and many rulers fashioned and built, each according to his choice and life style. It is a three, storeyed temple containing eleven temples inside. Its imposing towers, broad high walls adorned with exquisite carvings consumed fourteen crores of gold mohurs and it was ungrumblingly spent by Siddharaj. All but for renovation work only, since the original plan was abnormally big, built with 1600 pillars and 1800 idols adorned with jewels. Furthermore, there were 30,000 golden kalasas and 1700 flags fluttering over the towers. And so nothing restrains one comparing at to the splendour of Kailas. In divinity, inside, there were eleven mandirs, one for each of the Ekadasarudras, the different aspects of that great Lord. Its original name Srishhala, but was changed to Siddhapura after the patron king. The Mandir of Nilakanteswara Mahadev is said to have been built by the queen of Siddharaj. In addition, there are Vatakeswara, Bhutanata and Bramhandereswara temples, visualising the unsurpassable devotion of kings and the glory of Siva. A miss-not Saiva kshetra and it stands second to none but to itself both in conception and construction matching the position of the incomparable splendour of that All-time Highest Divinity - SIVA.

It lies 100 Km off Ahemadabad in the State of Gujarat enjoying all conveyance facilities.
TEMPELS IN INDONESIA

PRAMBANAM - SIVA TEMPLE

Introduction

The maritime activities of our ancient Indian rulers ventured far beyond the great oceans and established permanent settlements in Indonesia and Malaya Archipelago for the benefit of both Indians and aliens. Though they rose and declined according to their destinies on the main land and abroad too, the cultural links they forged with the natives remained longer. And some of the relics speak volumes of our adorable traditions that took roots in the foreign soil during their heyday. Even today, there are many temples standing testimony to the glory of Hindu religion, adored and upheld by the people there. Indians who settled down there built many places of worship to suit their creed and cult. Undergoing renovations from time to time, some of them are emitting spiritual fragrance to a commendable degree as in the mainland.

SIVA TEMPLE

Among such temples, a remarkable complex of one hundred and fifty shrines at Prambanan deserves mention. Though most of them are in ruins, or neglected due to impact of Buddhism, they enshrine several adorable gods and are receiving regular pujas according to sastric injunctions. Both Hindus and god-minded natives are participating in the periodical festivals, in addition to attending the regular prayer services with fervour due.

The Siva temple at Loro Djon grang testifies to this; and lo! its glory is on increase with the passage of time. The temple bears striking resemblance to the South Indian Sivan Tirukkoils in points of construction and traditions too. The tall tower, spacious courtyards and several niches with adorable gods reflect the glory of Saivism, though encircled by religions quite antagonistic to it, in nature, and adherence to customs. It contains grand specimens of sculptural pieces adorning its walls. It has a gallery beautified with 42 bas reliefs illustrating several episodes
from the Ramayana epic. It is a visit-worthy place of worship, irrespective of one's creed or cult.

It is at Prambananam, one of the flourishing cities in Java, and a principal part of Indonasia enjoying all types of transport facilities.

**BALI - SIVA MANDIR**

It is astounding to note that this region Bali, an integral part of Java of Indonasia claims the honour of having 2000 temples built at several places, like atop the mountains, on the seashores, in the little villages, and strangely enough in the paddy fields also. Further there is no village without temples, and each houses in the minimum three temples throughout the country, and are built in different places, like the Pura Puseh temple at the end of the village, dedicated to Vishnu, the Pura Desa, dedicated to Brahma in the middle of the village, and finally the Pura Dalem at another end, dedicated to Siva facing the sea. Another fascinating feature discernable is - each has distinct purpose like the Pura Puseh, going by the name of the Temple of Origin meant for village founders. The Pura Desa is used for performing ceremonies and the last the Pura Dalem called the temple of the Dead is used for the deities. Their traditions being queer due to local influence and alien culture, novelty stares into the eyes of the Indian visitors, accustomed to seeing Saivate gods in the manner described in the agamas. Whatever may be the intent on the part of the patrons for the building of the places of worship, and carrying of prayer services, the names of the adorable deities and the functions assigned deserves attention and adoration. Saivism that was established in the prehistoric days by the Indian settlers had passed through many vicissitudes of time, and hence the observance of a wide variety of ramifications of the original gods, traditions and customs. Yet the Indian names and adherence to basic concepts merits recognition and appreciation.

This sort of temples are found in every Balinese village, occupying the eastern most end of the island of Java, the principal island of Indonasia.
TEMPLES IN SRILANKA

TIRUKKONAMALAI - SIVAN TIRUKKOVIL

Introduction

The island Ceylon had adorned a covetable place in the scriptures of our Bharat even as far back as in the Tretayuga, when it was ruled by Ravanabrahma, who abducted Mother SITA and became the arch villain of Dharma. During his reign, there were Sivaalayas in numbers numerous, and Saivaaadhana was conducted on a scale pompous to the envy of gods and humans, as a matter of fact. After the yugas that followed nothing remained in proof of its former glory. Buddhist impact swallowed almost all the yugas-old Siva mahima. Moreover, with the advent of Britishers, some of the surviving ancient shrines went beyond recognition, due to their ignorance of our adorable culture. A few of them withstanding the onslaughts of nature and whimsicality of aliens, are found here and there displaying the immortality Siva mahima. Among them, the Sivan Tirukkovil at Trincomalee deserves mention and adoration.

Its ancient name as entered the mythologies is Thirukkonamalai, but the Britishers due to inadequacy of the Phoenices in their language and lack of vocal flexibility spelt and pronounced many of the Indian names as they like to suit their convenience, like Ujjain as Augin, Ajantha as Adjuntee, Sirajud Doula as Sir Roger Doule, Allahabad as Isle of Boats, Lakshmanapur as Luckypur; Tungabhadra as Toom Bandra; Sanderavan as Sundry bunds etc. etc. Among such Anglicised ones, Tirukkonamalai is one which became Trincomalee. This place is blessed with a Siva Thirukkovil and is located on a hill at the eastern sea shore of Srilanka. According to Puranas, this grand shrine was very popular and extremely holy as many Sivalisas were demonstrated in the dim past. It is deemed to be one of the three peaks of Kailas and considered as the Dhakshina Kailas. Among the Navalara, Sambandar paid rich tributes to the presiding deity and described its superb location and its glory elaborately. The whole region was redolent of Saivism and Tamil culture. It still retains its former glory, as regular worship according to Agamas is performed and periodical festivals and celebrated with great religious fervour. This shrine houses all the important icons, like Mother Parvathi, Ganeesh, Murugan, Nandi, Dhakshinamurti in grand and befitting niches. For Ceylonese Tamils it is the El Dorado of Saivism and they visit more often than not, whenever any auspicious occasion takes place in their houses. It is more or less a centre of pilgrimage to them.

It is accessible from Colombo by train and bus.
TALAIMANAR - TIRUKKEDHEECHARAM TIRUKKOVIL

Another very famous Siva Tirukkovil that etched its glorious name on the pages of both Simhaleese chronicles and Tamil Saiva scriptures is Tirukkedheecharam Sivan koil. It was visited by Tirugnana Sambhandar and Sundarar, whose lyrical out-bursts and accounts bring out the mysterious powers of the Kshetra called Mathottam and the demonstration of Sivalilas. The saints eulogised the holy place is such glorious way that the listeners determine to visit the place to make life disease proof. The Navalaras, Sundarar and Sambandar sang in sweet poems the Lord’s abundant compassion that lifted theists and showered boons on the ardent bhaktas. Adoration ensures blissful life and diseaseless existence.

This holy saivakshetra is located on the bank of river Palavi and the area is called Mathottam. The local names for the presiding deities are - Khedheecharar and Gouri Ambika. The temple contains all the Saivate gods installed in grand majestic minishrines. Regular prayers and periodical festivals are celebrated with great devotional fervour. Huge crowds throng the place and convert it into Bhukailas. Being at the western tip of ceylon touching Rameswaram almost all Tamilians from Bharat also visit often and adore the Lord frequently. It is a visit-worthy Saiva kshetra of global importance.

It lies 8 km off Talaimannar Railway station and is accessible by bus.

TEMPLES IN VIETNAM

MYSON - BHADRESWARA TEMPLES

Introduction

In several countries of East and Far-East, there are hundreds of Hindu temples of great antiquity, built by illustrious rulers of Indian origin. In the modes of construction, performance of worship, conduct of festivals and naming of shrines, Indianness and Hin-
duism strike the eye and thrill the frames of the culture-loving patriotic sons of India. Though daubed with alien culture — external or internal, and breathing un-Indian air, they have retained the Indian tradition to an astonishing degree that compels adoration. Siva predominates over other divinities in regard to the number of shrines built and creed professed. The unquestioned supremacy of Siva among the TRIO is quite discernable; for, many of the images on ceilings and walls depect Siva adorning the highest seat in the assemblage of gods like Brahma, Vishnu, Moon, Sun, Narayana etc. The myths and legends are given their due significance in the inscriptions and sculptural adornments. Above all, Siva was regarded as the national deity and reverence was extended in accordance with it. It is but natural then that Linga, the representation of the Lord is duly recognised and used as an object of veneration in temples. The kings of Indian origin were staunch Saivates, and in the tradition of few of other counterparts in India, they named the temples after them like Bhadreswara temple after the Bhadravarman, the redoubtable king of Champa, an integral part the present South Vietnam. Moreover, it was the customary practice of that country to designate the holy places after the rulers.

**BHADESWARA TEMPLE**

It was in the fifth century AD many Saivate shrines were built in Champa during the reign of Bhadravarma and he named the linga Sambhu Bhadreswara. This noble tradition was followed and carried on with great zeal by his successors, like Prakasavarma and Indravarma II. Their rich endowments took many shapes, like composition of poems in praise of that God of gods, in addition to beautifying the temples with sculptural master pieces. With the passage of time, their fervour reached new heights and many mythologies gained currency, stating that the Shambhu Bhadreswaralinga was given to the sage Brighu by Siva Himself, and who in turn gave it Uroja, a devout king of unprecedented spiritual eminence and indomitable valour. Siva was deemed the only god to be adored and so became the guardian deity of the country. In the eleventh century and later too Siva occupied the position of National God. Uroja, the ardent Siva bhakta renamed the old Sambhu Bhadreswara as Srisana Bhadreswara. His successors honoured the tradition and they went a step further calling themselves as the incarnation of Uroja and spent lavishly to glorifying the temple in many ways.
This famous temple is built atop the hill called Vagyan mountain and it houses all the adorable Saivate gods in befitting minishrines. It was Jaya Indravarman, who it appears emptied his treasure in heightening the glory of temple with gold coated pinnacles weighing 75 lbs of gold and 35000 lbs of silver. Devotion never reaches the point of satiety, nor votaries have gone out of existence. Is it not a matter of monumental contribution, in a way, to the Motherland that produced and sent them abroad to keep aloft the all-adorable Sanathana Dharma? A pardonable pride! And an indelible spot in the temple history!!

This lies in Myson of Champa in the South Vietnam.

PONAGAR - MAHESWAR MANDIR

This renowned Siva mandir like its proud counterpart in Myson of the very same Champa country has a glorious history of its own. Its reputation rests upon the celebrated Saivate rulers, who perpetuated the glory of Indian religion and brought colourful laurels to Saivism in particular. This is the major one of the temple group patronised and maintained by the rulers from the end of the 4th century and onwards. It is a matter of great gratification to learn that when the Hindu empire suffered or eclipsed temporarily due to the formidable military expeditions of Kambhujas, the temples were demolished, but some of the theist rulers on re-conquest, renovated and restored them to former glory; some times the images of rare beauty and lingas of infinite sanctity were received as booty from the defeated, who once seized them by force.

This temple group contains many shrines built for the principal gods of the Hindu pantheon, but Siva mandirs out number the others, for, Siva was the tutelary god of the rulers, country and people. Having enjoyed the royal patronage, their dimensions are imposing, architectural beauty awesome, and sculptural artistry is emulation worthy.

This lies in PôNagar - one of major cities of the Champa of South Vietnam.
APPENDIX NO. 1
SAIVISM - A SURVEY

Saivism is one of the six major schools of Hindu Philosophy. In terms of literature it produced; propounders claimed; impact exerted; adherents gained; popularity enjoyed; temples established, etc., its place is beyond guess; currency inestimable and attraction indescribable. In fine, its appeal is global. The other sects such as Vaishnavam, Saktam, Ganapatyam, Souram, Kaumaram pale into insignificance, if any attempt is made to institute a comparative study — its following is phenomenal. Not that the intrinsic worth of others is less, no potentialities, insignificant, but the place the Saivism is accorded by the immortal scriptural writings, particularly the Vedas make it soar higher than the highest; for, they proclaim and end “Sivaatparam taram nasti” — there is no god equal to HIM. In fine, He is unique.

Scriptures are vociferous in their emphasis and declare that Siva Himself is that Pranava, the premordial energy, instrumental for creation, protection and dissolution of the universes. Why then going further? What then is Saivism is to be probed now although it means worshipping of Siva? Who is Siva? SIVA is a Sanskrit word, and means “SUBHAM” i.e. auspiciousness. It signifies goodness and happiness that spring from one’s infinite faith in Siva and absolute unconditional surrender to His will. If professed so, the adorer becomes Saiva and receives Sivanugrah. “What is Saivism?” deserves elucidation. Tirumular, one of the Tamil saints says - Sivanodu Sambandham aanal Saivam. It means thereby that any relationship with Siva is called Saivism. Though brief, it embodies the essence and suffices the purpose. The first and foremost thing that it demands is one’s relationship with Siva, the Supreme Reality and belief that, over and above Him nothing exists nor dominates, say visibly or invisibly. This was accepted, advocated and upheld by intellectuals, who propagated this central message. People followed. And so it became a religion of universal significance. It held its grip on the mass and class of people in India, the land of its origin.

When its credibility gathered momentum, it encircled far off places both in west and east and became a religion of supreme significance —one of the oldest religions having its roots in the prehistoric times. As a concept of culture and high living it exerted tremendous influence in the dateless past, as a matter of fact. All but due to the services of dedicated humanist pravaktas, who crossing oceans and striding across the high peaks and unpassable deserts preached and successfully converted the aliens to a commendable degree. What all they believed, preached and practised is — the much-publicised aspects of Sat-Chit-Ananda are nothing but the manifestations of Lord Siva. He is the TRUTH, KNOWLEDGE and BLISS, in other words LIFE, LIGHT and LOVE, as some termed them. Saivates adore Siva as the Supreme God, and He manifests as Sakti also. And all other worshipful deities are none other than Siva, they aver. He is the cause of all, and as such true worshippers of Siva, it is observed, experience an inexplicable thrill at the mention of His name and feel His grace hovering over them increases to encompass their whole-
being. It is no exaggeration to say that momentary pleasure transforms itself into permanent bliss ending in Sayujya mukti — merging of individual self into that Universal Self. Several saint — seers and celebrated philosophers advanced their own findings to instill this truth through devotion that can be obtained by rituals and hymns, and hence the emergence of many cults, creeds, and schools of that very same philosophy like Advaita, Pratyabhijna darsana, Pasupatha, Virasaiva, Hatakeshwar, Saiva Siddhanta etc., to mention a few. As the terms they used are many, so are the ways they suggested. Technical terms such as chit, achit and Iswara signifying soul, prakrit and purusha by advaita school, come nearer to pati, pasu and pasa in Saiva Siddhanta standing for God; soul and bondage respectively. Each sect has its own distinct phraseology and it tries to establish its supremacy. The goal, of course, remains constant - emancipation of soul. Let us have a bird’s eye view of the major creeds and their relative claims for superiority. Better begin with Saiva Siddhanta, the most popular one in Tamil Nadu.

SAIVA SIDDHANTA SCHOOL

Saiva Siddhanta school draws its inspiration and sustenance more from the Saivagamas than the Vedas, and they are written in Tamil. It proclaims that the Vedas are meant for all, whereas Saiva Siddhanta concerns with the advanced souls only. The psalms and teachings of Saiva saints are the principal source of the Saiva Siddhanta, and the saints are called Navalar - the regenerators of the Saiva creed, who championed the cause of Bhakti cult. The Meikanda sutras - twelve in number called Tirumurais form the basis of this Siddhanta. The twelve are condensed into four parts. The first three assert the existence of three eternal entities called ‘pati, pasu and pasam’. Next three are confined to their nature and inter relationship existing among them. The other three explain the means for attaining emancipation - mukti. And the last three envisage the nature of mukti. These sutras are akin to Brahmasutras. Their logical reasoning and systematic presentation of truth won the appreciation of scholars and laymen alike. Simplicity and clarity are its plus points. This school is although widely prevalent in the south, it could not command as much following and popularity as that of the Advaita Philosophy of Jagadguru Sankara, which attained global importance. And chronologically it is older also. For full grasp, we have to go back to the time of Sankara. A brief account of Sankara and the nature of the age he lived in becomes expedient now.

ADVAITA SCHOOL

Coming to Sankara, it is said that no name is better known in the history of Brahmanic Philosophy than that of Sankara, and no doctrine is so familiar and exercised greater influence than his Moniam - advaita. The names of some of the Vedic seers, may perhaps confound 'layman,' but not Sankara's. He is a household name and his Philosophy is very familiar, though explanation eludes grasp. Now about his time. He was born in the 9th century AD, when Hinduism was in the doldrums due to abuse of power by the vested interests; and in consequence Saktaism, Jainism and Buddhism established their supremacy. Sankara, by his extra ordinary intellectual brilliance and
persuasive tongue backed by the mastery of Vedic lore scored victory over the then religions, and proved the superiority of Hinduism through his systematised Advaita Philosophy. The sanskrit word Advaita means non-dualism. According to it, only the ultimate Reality has actual existence and all the phenomenal existence is Maya or illusion. If simplified, it means, Brahman is the only Reality in the Universe. And the human soul is identical with Brahman only. He based his Philosophy on three entities - "I" "Mine" and "God". Terminology though underwent many changes with the advent of some more similar Acharyas, who founded their schools its cardinal principles remained same. For 'I' other terms such as Atma, Jivatma, Chetana, Anu, Jiva, Pasu etc. were used; they all but stand for SOUL. For 'Mine' prakrit, matter, material, object etc., were used. And finally for God, the third entity terms like the Absolute, Brahman, Pati, the Supreme were used.

To sum up, the Monism of Sankaracharya exercised unlimited sway and restored to Hinduism its former glory. Later, some Acharyas advanced their own views and started their schools of thought. Their philosophy and definitions received acceptance in some quarters and so many cults emerged. Factions raised their heads and society was cut asunder leading to spiritual unrest. A quick look at the different cults of Saivism pays. Among the many schools of philosophy, Pasupatha is one.

PASUPATHA SCHOOL: The Pasupatha school is more ancient than Monism and Lakulisa is its founder. Pancharatrabhasya is the authoritative treatise embodying the five principles of this school. They are - cause, effect, meditation, behaviour and dissolution of sorrow. It begins with three attributes 'pasu, pasa and pati' and ends with an emphasis that Pasupati i.e. Siva is the highest God-Head and adoration to Him emancipates the pasu-man. It is this that became the forerunner of other schools such as Pratyabhigna darsan school in Kashmir, Saiva siddhanta in Dravida desa, Vira saiva in Karnataka etc. Having discussed the main principal and their approach of Saiva siddhant already, let us have a peep at Pratyabhigna darsana school of Saivism that originated and exerted its hold in Kashmir.

PRATYABHIGNA DARSANA SCHOOL: It came to fore only in the eleventh century and rather confined itself to Kashmir alone. It resembles the Saiva siddhanta philosophy of Tamil Nadu, but did not exert as much grip as that of Saiva Siddhanta. It was expounded by Abhinavagupta. Next comes Hatakeshwarapasana.

HATAKESWAROPASANA SCHOOL: It has a fascinating beginning. According to legend, when Siva was found roaming about like a half naked fakir, in the country of Anartha, in forlorn state after the death of Sati the hermits dwelling there found it indecent and unbearable, and so cursed Him. At once the Linga that was given to them by Siva Himself went to Patala. At the devout prayers to Brahma, they were given Hatakalinga for regular worship and it was called Hatakeshwaralinga. One pious bhakta by name Chitra Sarma drawn irresistibly to this Linga offered prayers with unparalleled fervour. His prayer services were praise-worthy and they attracted huge following. Pleased with austere life and erudite scholarship, Siva
approved his plea for introducing Saivaaradhana according to his way. This bhakti cult gathered momentum and spread that entire region of Vadnagar also called Chamatkarpur then. And with the patronage of rich philanthropists, Chitra Sarma built 68 temples for Siva and became the founder of Hatakeswaropasana. And his cult had its own philosophy and earned great following.

Now examine the Virasaiva school, which originated in the state of Karnatak and is enjoying even now large following.

VIRASAIVA SCHOOL OF SAIVA PHILOSOPHY

It is one of the main schools of Saiva Philosophy, with a difference. Like other schools, it believes that Siva is the Highest God-Head and, Saivism is one of the oldest and celebrated religions of the world. Unlike Saiva Siddhanta, it draws its sustenance on the sanskrit works wholly, in addition to leaning on its own literature written in Kannada. Though it is grown out of Saivism, it has its own individuality, and contradicts not any other schools or Saivism or its mother. It was founded by five illustrious Prophets, viz. Revanaradhya, Marularadhya, Ekororamadhya, Panditaradhya and Visvaradhya. More than these five originaters, Basava, supposed to be the incarnation of Nandi, born to revive the drooping flag of Virasaivism is held in esteem and is exceedingly popular to the extent, that he far surpassed the founders in popularity and following. Credit goes to him for breathing fresh life into Virasaivism and making it more popular than it was, prior to his birth in the twelfth century. It made a significant contribution to Saivism thereafter. It claims to possess 28 agamas, 105 upagamas besides the sayings of a great number of mystics.

ITS SPECIAL FEATURES

Virasaivism attaches utmost importance to the Linga and deems it the Ultimate Reality. It equates it with Parabrahman of the Upanishads. And declares that creation, protection and involution have emerged from it. It proclaims in unambiguous terms that though Siva transcended all forms and attributes - Nirakara Nirguna Brahma, He assumed form to help His votaries to realise Him. It advocates Sakara Sagunopasana with the wearing of Istalinga invariably, and adhering to the instructions of the spiritual preceptor. It believes that the individual is a part of Siva, the Ultimate Reality. So duality does not exist. Its monism is akin to Sankara's Advaitha Philosophy.

In order to eradicate the three fold taint, viz., Karanika, Maya and Anava, the individual soul has to take Diksha, and done at the right time, he becomes pure. It prescribes eight aids — Astavaranas for the protection and guidance of aspirant, and when followed strictly, he becomes fit to search for Truth. In addition to his adherence to the eight aids, like the Guru, Linga, Jangama, Padodaka, Prasada, Bhasma, Rudraksha and Mantra, he is enjoined to implement Btryacara and Ganacara. Strict adherence to these accelerates his progress and ends with the disappearance of Anga-individual self and gets united with the Linga, the universal self. The final union of Anga with the Linga is materialised with steadfast devotion, which evolves through six stages. Thus Virasaivism accords
highest importance to the moulding of noble and divine life. Through Bhakti, gnaana and kriya, the aspirant realises the Supreme Reality. Above all, Virasatavism never preaches nor counsels renouncing of the world, but lays utmost importance to the development of right ideals and pure living for achieving social equality and spiritual freedom. Though the state of Karnataka is its strong hold, it spread to far off states, particularly to Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh and is still commanding huge following.

Just as liquid takes the shape of the container, Lord Siva too appears in several forms, depending upon the angle of vision of the viewers. But Siva is Siva non-pariel in all. Would the fragrance of the ROSE differ with its daubing in colours various?

**APPENDIX II**

**MYSTICISM OF THE COSMIC DANCE**

Among the modern trends of thought that India has successfully inculcated in the minds of the west, the glory of the fine arts and particularly Bharata Natya deserves first place. It created new history. This notable achievement is superb and the reputation it brought to Indian culture is phenomenal, and became instrumental in planting the banner of Hinduism over the citadels of western culture. The Bharata Natyam and its other forms owe their existence to the cosmic dance of Nataraja. Great exponents, and Natyacharyas diving deep into its ocean brought out dazzling diamonds of eternal brilliance. They taught and followed their disciples all over the world and displayed divinity of Hindu culture with such effectiveness, that the foreigners of some advanced countries bowing to its glory, are learning it with such steady fastness and dedication that our savants too are approving, gaping at the display of their mastery. It is indeed a matter of great pride and glowing tribute to the art. A glance of its glory pays.

The cosmic dance is an integral part of Saivism, and so a brief elucidation is deemed a necessity here. The indefatigable labours of devout scholars, who dived deep into the ocean of Saiva Philosophy aided and abetted by the toilsome probe made into by the art critics of both east and west have thrown up certain eternal truths that expound the import and purport of the cosmic dance of Lord Siva. Their findings infer that Siva is the King of dancers and His Cosmic dance has an esoteric significance as it is imbued with mysticism of high order.

Going to the origin they say that the world itself is the theatre for Lord Siva to demonstrate 108 varieties of dance therein. And among them nine are deemed very important and popular. Great exponents inspired by the writings of Bharatamuni, the founder have given detailed accounts of this in their treatises. It is said in Somastavarajah that "The three worlds are but the dancing hall of God Siva. The king of dancers is the Supreme Siva Himself. The audience, actors and the stage are all evolved by the Lord from His own self in association with His consort Sakti or Uma".

Siva's cosmic dance represents the primal rhythmic energy. This has deep symbolism, proclaiming, in addition to other factors,
that all the deities along with planets are taking part in it along with Siva, the protagonist of the play. It mirrors the harmonised rhythm of the Universe and depicts its energy, rhythm, harmony and orderliness. So it is made the object of veneration. The image of Nataraja invariably found in every Sivaalaya conforms to the Uttama Dasa Tala measurement and exemplifies its import vividly. Before going into details, rivet your attention on the Nataraja image. It has two legs and four hands. The front left hand reveals Gajahasta pose; the back left hand holds the fire-pot, whereas Damaru is held in the back right hand and the right front arm showing the Abhaya pose. The lifted up left leg turning towards, keeps across the right leg. Its head is adorned with Jatamakuta, flowers, snake, jewels, of course the crescent moon atop, and ears with Makara and Patra kundalas. And the yagnoparita across the chest, smeared with saffron paste, dominating the whole milky white body which is draped in tiger’s skin.

Now visualise the demonstration of dance-Parvathi, His consort, according to agama sastras stands to the right, and the sage Brungi, or Bhadrakali to the left. The prabhambandala around the dancing Siva resembles the orb of the Sun. The eyes bear resemblance to that of the eyes of Kurari bird. Thus equipped, Siva dances and it symbolises the five fold activities or the pancha kriyas - sristi - creation, shhti - preservation, samhara - destruction, tirohiva - illusion and anugraha - grace. Listen to the meaning of the symbols - creation emerges from the Dhamaru; protection from the abhayahasta; destruction from fire, refuge and release from the foot held aloft. This redeems souls from bondage and bestows on them eternal bliss.

Realising this form and grasping its import, perhaps, Tirumular hails - Chidambaram, the augst seat where Nataraja performed Bhujangatrasa, one of the nine principal varieteis, is everywhere, everywhere His dance. It takes place in the heart and self of every individual. Lord Siva - the Pasupati snaps the pasa binding pasu to this transitory sin-ridden world. The place where the Lord dances is the smasana symbolises as heart and the burnt out object is the ego or karma.

Finally, Siva performs this dance to keep up the life of the cosmos and help seekers in achieving liberation. It is also identified with the Sivapanchakshara mantra - NA MA SI VA YA. Moreover, the pranavamantra AUM and Panchakshhari are identified with this cosmic dance according to scholar-critics. Would such mystism and divine significance remain concealed for ever? Its revival revealed its multi-faceted splendour and is making the intellectuals be swept off their feet at a mere glance of a single gesture or movement of the limbs of the exponents. Hail the revival and avail Sivalilas for emancipation.

**APPENDIX III**

**EMBLEMS OF SIVA**

Emblems, by nature represent certain ideas and ideals more conspicuously than the objects they stand for. Their visual appeal is
decidedly great. Among the many emblems the Saivism adopted, at least three deserve mention. They are classified into visual and mental. Ash marks on the forehead is one, and it at once declares that the wearer is a Saiva. It has great symbolic significance. Saivism attaches a very great importance to it. According to agamas, Lord Siva - pati in the role of layakara - dissolution of life snaps - pasa bond, binding man - pasu to this transitory sinful world. He burns them to ashes out of extreme love for his own children. His joy over this is ecstatic and He does it wilfully to lifting them from eternal thraldom. As a mark of this, He smears it on His forehead and all over body, as a matter of fact. Saivas are enjoined to smear their forehead as Siva does. The three distinct lines across the forehead indicate one's wilful adherence to Saivite philosophy. The three stands for pati, pasa and pasu - the three cardinal tenets of Saivism. And lo! for the honour of it, and its defence, battles were fought and blood was shed in the past by zealots, due to prevailing trends of religion.

Next is Rudraksha mala. It has a long legend behind it. It runs - the demon Tripura turned a veritable Yama to humans and devas on getting innumerable boons from Brahma. Mother Earth accompanied by gods, reached Kailas and wailed piteously before Siva soliciting His intervention for killing him. The pathetic tale was so moving that Lord Siva actually shed tears before them. They were later converted into seeds. Trees that have grown from them are found in Himalayan region in plenty, as it was the scene of action. Weaving them on thread and wearing in the form of mala recalls to minds the Lord's Omnibenevolence, and it is a mark of devotion to the Lord also. Scriptures, particularly Jabalopanishad and Devipurana have devoted extensive space to bringing out the efficacy of Rudrakshadhara, its various aspects, like number of rudraksha to be worn, places to be adorned, their kinds and faces together with the curative effects of wearing etc. The rudraksha is akin to a multifaceted gem, since it has faces also. They range from one to fifteen and each face has it distinct qualities, effects, uses and the like. The faces, strangely enough represent gods and auspicious things. They confer many benefits like prosperity, wealth, health, mental peace, besides purging of sins. Moreover, to offer ritualistic worship to Siva, all and sundry are not eligible. One entitles to offer worship only with the smearing of vibhuti on the forehead and wearing of Rudrakshamala. So these two have attained pre-eminence and gained a coveted place in Saivism. They are the signs of bestowal of His grace.

The last emblem is the potent chant called Siva Panchakshari. This has the highest significance and it is mental unlike the other two.

**SIVA PANCHAKSHARI MANTRA**

This penta — syllabic word “NAMASIVAYA”, consisting of 10 letters is a potent chant with deep mystic significance. It simply means “I bow to Siva”, but it is endowed with such mysticism and infinite power that it blesses the chanter with an invulnerable armour that he comes out victorious in every venture he undertakes. Normally
it is imparted to the disciple or sadhaka by the Guru - preceptor at the time of initiation to join into the fold of Saivism. The sadhaka is enjoined to chant it prefixing it, with the pranava AUM invariably. Hence twice blessed - two flowers at a single pick, in a way. Importantly, it is one of the three Saiva emblems, the others being smearing of sacred ash and wearing of Rudraksha mala, going by the name of visible emblems discussed above. And the panchakshari is a mental one, so invisible.

A peep into the depth of meaning of each syllable visualises its inner potentialities and divine powers. The syllable 'YA' placed at the end stands for the soul and yearns to attain oneness with SI, the third syllable representing Siva; VA, the fourth syllable stands for the grace that comes only from SI preceeding it; but its knowledge is fettered by MA, the bond, binding one to this mundane world; the first syllable NA signifies the power of obscuration which causes the soul YA to be bound and obscures its vision. When chanted with genuine devotion under the guidance of guru, the sadhaka rises and snaps MA and NA and progresses forward with the abundant help and grace VA - towards SI i.e. Siva. If chanted during the daily ritualistic worship with austerities due and single-minded concentration, the sadhaka feels rising heavenwards, since beatitude pervading him makes his life livable, enjoyable, nay adorabe to be true. Highly evolved souls rose to Himalayan heights by its power and enjoyed the Sannidhya mukti and ultimately Sayuja prapti besides illumination. Mother Parvathi, chanted it fifty lakhs of times and obtained the most honorific name of Jnanapravunambika. Her concentration and devotion have become models and serve as an unfailing guide to get emancipation. Nothing surpasses, nor stands as peer to this chant of chants that confers Jnana, bliss and deliverance. This holy chant is embedded in the Rudradyaya in the fifth prapetaka of the fourth kanda of the Taithriya samhita of Krishna Yajurveda. It is hailed as the quintessence of the Vedas - OM Namas Sivayacha, Siva terayacha.

APPENDIX - IV

TEMPLE VISIT - SEQUENCE IN THE WORSHIP OF THE ADORABLES

Worship means extension of reverence to the Almighty Providence, for all that He has created for our welfare. This expression of gratitude is a duty, and marks the evolution of the soul. It has many ways, and scriptures have laid down a set procedure and envisaged merits also. It has many forms, depending upon the nature of person's mental state — developed, or undeveloped or the developing stage. Place of performance too is of utmost importance. Worship offered in one's own closet, or visiting temples to join the congregational has its benefits. Worship is of two kinds — individual worship and mass worship.

For mass worship, temples are the convinient places and they confer manifold blessings, and it is enjoined by scriptures specifically; but for individuals, sequestered place is advocated, if their souls are highly evolved. Their manasa puja is superior and realisation also
becomes quicker. The spiritually developed individuals, normally, evoke a mental image of God for contemplation and meditate upon Him sitting anywhere and doing at any hour. For commoners, bhajyapuja with all paraphernalia, like flowers, coconut, camphor, tambula etc., is indispensable. Temples, built and maintained by manavathavadis enable people to come in close contact with one another during congregational bhajans, satsang activities and the like. When people belonging to all castes and communities congregate at one place and perform community worship, emotional integration develops unconsciously and binds them into one single entity. Don't the assembled raise their voices in unison, when the much-revered archamurti gleams into their sight on lifting the screen? Don't they jostle with one another often as they move forward in queues? Aren't they standing side by side, and one behind another, while prasad is distributed? Will the regionalism, or jingoism stand in the way of their unity in the sanctum? Sure, national integration then binds them into one unbreakable oneness. Moreover, as the temples are adorned with sculptural beauty pieces, they instil the much-coveted aestheticism and make them the lovers of art, and finally adorers of mankind. This has been the motive behind the builders since the dawn of religion. Iconography, architecture, sculpture exercise their tremendous impact to make man as that man, who could stand on par with God.

The temple parts whether lofty or modest have their specific purposes. The tower to begin with, by the immensity of its height, shape and sculpture awakens the instincts of bhakti at mere sight. It is recorded that the tower is the sthulalinga, while the Sivalinga inside is the sukhshmalinga. Beautification of tower with images of gods create in people the feeling of god-awareness, when seen even from a distance, and importantly it enables some unfortunate people adore the sthula linga, being forbidden to enter due to sectarian traditions of the bygone past. Devout bhaktas join their palms and utter the names of presiding deities, either in loud tones or muffled voices at the sight of towers, visible for miles around. On reaching and taking bath in the temple Pushkarini, which normally has fantastic origin, they prostrate before the tower since it bears the images on its tail, broad surface almost all the worshipful deities. On crossing the portal, according to sculptural commandments, they have to worship Lord Vinayaka, the remover of all obstacles in every venture although there are innumerable icons, each with a power of its own and deep esoteric significance. Forgetfulness of this leads to disaster, be it the heavenly beings, or manavasreshtas. So agrapuraja is to be made to Vinayaka Bhagawan.

Lord Maheswar his own father too made rich recompense once, for neglecting the worship due to this pot-bellied, short statured, elephant headed, single tusked, rat-borne god. So stand in anjali pose and offer mental worship with or without hymns. His physical form according to sastras is the representation of the premordial sound AUM. Then comes the Sivalinga. This is the formless form -rupaarupa replica of the Highest Absolute. Several ritualistic prayer services are advocated for fulfilment of different kinds of desires. Adherence to them is essential for full benefit, but the priest — the mediator between the aorer and adored must be of a pious type,
well versed in his duties. Receiving prasad and adorning the forehead with ash marks, you should make exit to worship Nataraja invariably. Every Siva temple contains a bronze image of Nataraja, the symbolic representation of Siva, who discharges five fold functions for the deliverance of the souls from earthly pasas — bonds. Agamas are replete with elucidation of this Nataraja’s panchakriyā dance. The five functions - creation, preservation, dissolution, obscuration and benefaction of grace are symbolised respectively by sounding of the drum; holding of the arm even; holding of fire pot in left hand; planting of right foot on ignorance and lifting of left foot. It is the visual portrayal of the Saiva philosophy. It has another august name Panchaksha dance - symbolic of the Panchakshara mantra - NAMASIVAYA. Accordingly, the drum stands for the removal of maya; the fire for burning of Karma; planted right foot for removal of anava mala - ignorance, benedictory hand for the bestowal of grace and raised left foot for conferrment of bliss to the liberated soul. So He merits obeisance.

The object of worship next comes is Mother Parvathi installed in a separate shrine. Though she is inseparable from her Lord, occupying His half body here, she is separated and given a distinct form and called Sakti. She richly deserves obeisance, since her part of energy, and Siva’s part of consciousness are different, and combination of the two alone gives the cosmos its life and light. Their togetherness is comparable to coin with its two sides - observe and reverse. So prayers to her icon is a must. Muruga worship follows now. He is another form of Siva endowed with distinct attributes. Some mythologies enjoin offering prayers along with Muruga to Valli, Devayani, and his formidable spear, as they symbolise, Ichcha, Kriya and Jnana - willing, doing and knowing. So, a necessity.

The next puja is to be offered to Chandesa, an ordinary mortal raised to the status of General of Pramada ganas - Siva’s forces. He was a canonised saint and hence worshipping is a MUST. The four Saiva Samayaacharyas Appar, Sambandar, Sundarar and Manikyavachakar invariably found in the company of sixty three Nayanmars deserve adoration too. Coming out of the inner prakara, we greet the image of Dakshinamurti, always installed in the western most niche on the southern wall of the garbha griha. Before coming out Rishabha or Nandi, the vehicle of Siva, is to be prayed for. And the worship will be complete with the worship offered to Sthala vriksha found in every temple.

This sequence is to be followed invariably, when a visit is made to Siva temple. Full merit is ensured, if this order is followed.
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