



# ICONOGRAPHY OF PILGRIMAGE SITES: READINGS THROUGH THE MURAL PAINTINGS OF NATTAM KOVILPATTI, TAMIL NADU

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**Abstract:** The sacred sites of Hinduism or the places of Hindu pilgrimage may be regarded as pan-Indian as they attract the people residing in all parts of India. These sites are glorified in literature, oral traditions, and in the Sthala Purāṇas of the temples and the visual arts. Among the mural paintings of South India of late medieval times, the cycle of topographic paintings of the Kailāsanātha temple at Nattam Kovilpatti is very elaborate as they cover a large number of pilgrimage sites of different sects of Hinduism. The present paper is an attempt to examine the iconography of the sacred centres as portrayed in the mural paintings and narrated in the popular temple myths or Sthala Purāṇas for a better understanding of the religious traditions and practices observed by the people of medieval India. The concepts of 'sacred geography', 'sacredscape' and 'faithscape' are briefly dealt with in analysing the network of pilgrimage and the religious symbolism with the help of the mural paintings through iconographic and iconological approaches. The study provides some new insight into the religious harmony, the familiarity of the donors and devotees of the temple with different kinds of pilgrim centres and the popularity of certain sacred centres.

**Key words:** Kailāsanātha temple, Sthala Purāṇas, pushkarīṇi, Ādivarāha, Karuppusāmi

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The mural paintings of Tamil Nadu of the post-Vijayanagar period are found on the ceilings of the open *maṇḍapa* halls, walls of the temples, pillared circumambulatory halls or palaces with a distinct style that differentiate them from the

earlier periods under the patronage of the local ruling *Nāyaka* chiefs. The *Nāyaka* chiefs and their officers as well as the devotees seem to have liberally patronised and contributed much to the development and spread of the temple-centred

*bhakti* during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries CE. In the temples of South India religion in general plays a pivotal role in the socio-religious life of the people as it greatly influenced the themes of the paintings and it is more so, in the case of the mural paintings in the temples of Tamil Nadu across the ages. There are several publications on the mural paintings of South India that provide an overview of the narrative art based on the Epic and Pauranic themes. But they rarely focus on the topographic paintings that adorn the walls and ceilings of the temples of medieval South India. Although some of the paintings of this kind are brought to the limelight by a few scholars (Seastrand: 2013 and Raja: 2019) the iconological and iconographical aspects are not usually discussed in depth. In this backdrop, it is intended to focus on the themes, structure and iconography of the mural paintings depicted on the ceiling of the *maṇḍapa* of the *Kailāsanātha* temple at Nattam Kovilpaṭṭi and to analyse the religious underpinning for the discussion of the topographic images of Tamil Nadu. In this connection, the local traditions and the *Sthala Purāṇas* based on the myths and legends on the origin of the temples, sacred *tīrthas* and the deities

will be discussed to unravel the salient features of the sacred centres, religious belief systems and practices as experienced by the pilgrims through the mural paintings of Nattam.

The concept of Pauranic *kshētras* is a later development and the deities were installed within the temples at the water sources, river banks, and sea-shore or at the confluence of rivers or at the top of a hill or at the foothills. Great sanctity is attached to the waters of the *pushkariṇi* (pond/tank) of the temples, *sthalavrikshas* or to the hills or mountains where the shrines are located. Visiting these temples, paying obeisance to the deities enshrined therein and having a bath in the temple tanks or the sacred waters of the rivers were some of the age-old practices for various reasons. The multiple gods in Hinduism and their worship for specific purposes resulted in the construction of several temples for gods of different natures - benevolent and malevolent. Diana L Eck observes that *darshan* (viewing the deity) is a visual experience charged with religious meaning and seeing thus literally believes in imbuing the image of the *tīrtha* itself with godly properties associated with the actual place (Eck: 1998:59).

**Table 1a): Details of the Names and Images of the Sacred Sites Depicted in the Mural Paintings of Kailāsanātha Temple, Nattam Kovilpaṭṭi (North Wing)**

Three River streams on the top Left; <i>Viśvanātha</i> in the central shrine (in <i>Liṅga</i> form); Goddess <i>Viśālākshmi</i> seated in a shrine on his Left; Twenty-two miniature <i>liṅgas</i> are shown in the temple complex. <b>Trivēṇi (in Telugu)</b> <b>Banaras/KāśiViśvanātha</b>	<i>Śiva Liṅga</i> and <i>Pārvaṭī</i> in two separate shrines; <i>Kannappa</i> standing in front of <i>liṅga</i> with one leg and a hand raised; An elephant, a snake and a spider worshipping; <i>Nandi</i> in front of <i>liṅga</i> <b>Kalahasti</b>	<i>Aruṅāchala Unnamulai Ammān</i> and the hills in the background <b>Tiruvannamalai</b>	Partly damaged; Name of the temple is not known; <i>Liṅga</i> and goddess in two separate shrines; Pillared <i>maṇḍapa</i> hall, <i>jambu</i> tree, plantain tree, water tank; <i>dhvajasthambha</i> Traces of another shrine
<i>Tiruvaṇamarudūru</i> (in Telugu); <i>Liṅga</i> and <i>Pārvaṭī</i> in two different shrines with a tree ( <i>Maruda</i> ) in between the shrines <b>Tiruvidadimarudur</b>	<i>Siyyāli</i> in Telugu; <i>Liṅga</i> and <i>Pārvaṭī</i> in shrines Image of <i>Bhairava</i> standing on the top left corner. <b>Sirkali</b>	<i>Liṅga</i> in a shrine. <i>Śivakāmī</i> and <i>Naṭarāja</i> in other shrines <b>Chidambaram</b>	<i>Vishṇu</i> stands with <i>Śrīdēvī</i> and <i>Bhūdēvī</i> ; <i>Śivaliṅga</i> in a shrine; <i>Pārvaṭī</i> stands on a pedestal to the left of the shrine. <b>Kanchipuram</b>
<i>Liṅga</i> and <i>Pārvaṭī</i> in separate shrines <i>Pushkariṇi</i> (water tank) and the figure of <i>Gaṇēśa</i> <b>Kumbhakonam</b>	<i>Tyāgēśvara</i> in Telugu; <i>Liṅga</i> and <i>Pārvaṭī</i> in separate shrines; Water tank and a large processional <i>ratha</i> <b>Tiruvarur/Kamalalayam</b>	<i>Vaidyanātha</i> in Telugu; <i>Liṅga</i> in a shrine on the Left; <i>Subrahmaṇya</i> with his two consorts <i>Dēvaśēna</i> on his Right and <i>Valli</i> on his Left; On the extreme Right is the image of the goddess (damaged). <b>Pulli (rukku) velur/Vaidyanātha</b>	

<i>Jambukēśvaram</i> (in Telugu). <i>Liṅga</i> and <i>Pārvatī</i> are in two shrines; One ascetic is seated cross-legged and a <i>jambu</i> tree raises from his body. <b>Tiruvanaikkaval</b>	<i>Liṅga</i> and <i>Pārvatī</i> in two shrines. <b>Tiruvayaru</b>	Two shrines showing <i>Liṅga</i> and <i>Pārvatī</i> in the shrines <b>Vriddhachalam</b>	<i>Vishṇu</i> reclined on <i>Śēsha</i> with a bow and arrow in his hands. His two consorts are seated close to his feet. It can be identified as the temple of <i>Sāraṅgapāṇi</i> at Kumbhako- nam; <b>Sāraṅgapāṇi</b>
<i>Kailāsa</i> in Telugu Damaged Images of <i>Śiva</i> and <i>Pārvatī</i> attended by worshippers	<b>Nattam</b> Damaged	<i>ChokkaLiṅgamNāyuḍuSada</i> (Portrait) Donor	
		<i>Murugan</i> on a peacock with <i>Vallī</i> and <i>Dēvasēna</i>	
		King's representative and temple priest	

**Table 1b): Details of the Names and Images of the Sacred Sites Depicted in the Mural Paintings of Kailāsanātha Temple, Nattam Kōvilpaṭṭi-South Wing (Fig.1.1)**

<b>Srīraṅgam</b> <i>Vishṇu</i> reclining on his Left on a serpent with its hood raised above the head of <i>Vishṇu</i> . In the foreground are the <i>utsavabēras</i> of the <i>sthānaka</i> form of <i>Vishṇu</i> with the images of <i>Śrīdēvī</i> and <i>Bhūdēvī</i> seated. On the top right is the water tank and on the top Left is a deity seated.	<b>Trisirapu...</b> (Unidentified)	<b>Pera...</b> (Unidentified)	<b>Tiruchendur</b> Six-faced <i>Subrahmanya</i> riding on a peacock with his consorts <i>Vallī</i> and <i>Devasēnā</i> standing on either side of him.
<b>Madurai Chokkanāthasvāmi</b> <i>Minakshī</i> stands within a separate temple on the Left and below is a water tank with two other seated images on either side. A pillared hall encircles the temple, One large image of Ganesa is depicted between the shrines of <i>Minākshī</i> and <i>Śiva</i> in <i>liṅga</i> form. The temple of <i>Śiva</i> is supported by four elephants and in front of the shrine is shown a seated bull. An ascetic sits with his uplifted knees bent, below a <i>Kadamba</i> tree and feeds the white elephants. Below the <i>Śiva</i> temple depicted the images of <i>Subrahmanya</i> , and <i>Naṭarāja</i> within a circular arch that extends down below and a water tank. Above on the Left and Right corners are the figures of <i>Śiva</i> and <i>Pārvatī</i> in the seated position.	<b>Chikkītāmala</b> <i>Murugan</i> and <i>Dēvasēnā</i> seated within a large frame along with sage <i>Nārada</i> . <i>Śiva</i> in <i>liṅga</i> form and <i>Pārvatī</i> , standing are on the Left while five other deities- <i>Vishṇu</i> , <i>Gaṇēśa</i> , <i>Murugan</i> , <i>Durgā</i> and <i>Karuppusvāmi</i> (guardian deity) are shown. Oval-shaped water tank occupies the centre of the foreground. <b>Tirupparankunram</b>	<b>Paḷini (Paḷinimalai) (Murugan)</b> <i>Murugan</i> stands alone with a <i>daṇḍa</i> in his hand in the main shrine. His consorts- <i>Vallī</i> and <i>Devasēnā</i> are in separate shrines; Below this are the figures of Demon <i>Iḍumban</i> carrying hills in a <i>kāvaḍi</i> on his shoulders; <i>Subrahmanya</i> with a spear ( <i>Śakti</i> ) in one hand and a <i>liṅga</i> . On the bottom right is a donor devotee with hands in <i>añjali</i> hasta.	

<p><b>SōlemaleAḷugharsvāmi</b>  <i>Vishṇu</i> stands in <i>samapā-dasthānaka</i> form accompanied by his two consorts <i>KalyāṇaSundaravallī</i> and <i>Āṇḍāl</i> who stands on either side of him; An image of <i>Karuppusvāmi</i> is depicted; <i>YōgaNarasimha</i> sits in a small shrine with <i>chakra</i> and <i>śaṅkha</i> in his upper two hands; on the bottom right and above this are the hills and the peak of it is shown as the head of the bull raised high (<i>Vṛishabhagiri</i>) and water flows from the hills into a small rectangular tank</p>	<p><b>Tīrupatī</b>  <i>Vishṇu</i> stands in a shrine; Two handed standing images of <i>Varāha</i> with face turned to his Left in a shrine on the top left corner; Goddess seated in a shrine on the lower Left corner. <i>Pushkariṇi</i> is on the other side in a rectangular shape. Above it is the hills surmounted by the raised hood of the serpent</p>	<p><b>RamesvaramRāmaliṅgamParvatavarddhanī</b>  <i>Liṅga</i> and <i>Pārvatī</i> are in two separate shrines of equal size. Below are shown the waters of the ocean with aquatic bodies</p>	<p><b>PaḷiniAvināṅkuḍi</b>  <i>Śiva</i> and <i>Pārvatī</i> in two shrines; <i>Subrahmaṇyan</i> as a child seated on his mount peacock on the Left within a shrine; A ceremonial chariot in the foreground. Traces of three other images on the bottom right</p>
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In the above tables, one can see the layout of the paintings of the sacred *kshētras* as they exist in the North as well as on the South wings of the central register. These topographical paintings convey not only the importance of the different pilgrimage sites but also prompt the viewer an attitude toward seeing and imagining the presence at those sacred centres. The paintings thus have a function value besides the aesthetic appeal to the visitors since they afford the devotees a vision or *darshan* of the sacred sites in detail. The concept of the *tīrthapaṭas* or pilgrimage maps that serves the same purpose dates back to the fifteenth century in India and one can cite several examples from the Jain religion in this connection. On the other hand, the portrayal of the Hindu pilgrimage centres in the mural paintings of South India makes their appearance somewhat later and these can be dated to the seventeenth century. To facilitate the devotees to understand the essential features of the sacred sites as narrated in the *Sthala Purāṇas* and mythology and to identify them more accurately, the names of the places and the deities are mentioned and sometimes the names of the main deities of the temples are inscribed by the artists in both Telugu and Tamil scripts. These short figure label inscriptions are written in white colour on the black colour background at the bottom of each of the panels. The following table presents the

geographical location of the sacred sites painted on the ceiling of the Kailāsanātha temple. Since the Hindus believe that their spiritual journey will not be completed without a pilgrimage visit to Varanasi in the North and Ramesvaram in South India for attaining salvation (*mōksha*) and to get oneself liberated from the cycle of death and re-birth both the places are considered as the important places of spiritual destination and they are included among the mural paintings besides several other sacred centres.

Of the twenty-seven temples shown in the mural paintings, nineteen temples relate to Śiva and Pārvatī; five temples to Vishṇu; and three temples to Murugan (Table 2). The location of the three temples is unknown and from the incomplete labels and other details, we can identify the geographical location of the remaining temples. From the details presented above, it is evident that the network of pilgrimage is not confined to the present-day Tamil Nadu alone but it extended far beyond covering the sacred city of Varanasi situated on the banks of the sacred river Ganges and Prayaga (Allahabad), the place of amalgamation of the three rivers - Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Sarasvatī. The several sacred places depicted on the ceiling of Kailāsanātha temple include the *Śaivakshētras* as well as the popular *Vaishṇavakshētras* and three sacred sites out of the six *kshētras* dedicated

Table: 2 Location of the Sacred Centres

Sl. No.	Name of the Sacred Centre	Location of the Sacred Centre District and State	Name of the Deity; Nature of Temple
1	AlagharKōyil	Madurai; Tamil Nadu	Alagharsvāmi; Viṣṇu
2	Tirupati	Tirupati; Andhra Pradesh	Viṣṇu
3	Rāmēśvaram	Ramanathapuram; Tamil Nadu	RāmaṅgamParvatavarddhanī; Śiva
4	Paḷini	Dindigul; Tamil Nadu	Śiva
5	Paḷini	„ „	Murugan
6	Madurai	Madurai Tamil Nadu	Chokkanāthasvāmi and Mīnākshī; Śiva
7	Tirupparaṅkuṅram (Chikkitāmala)	Madurai; Tamil Nadu	Murugan;
8	Śrīraṅgam	Tiruchirapalli; Tamil Nadu	ŚrīRaṅganāthasvāmi; Viṣṇu
9	Triśarapu...	Unidentified	Śiva
10	Pera..	„ „	Unidentified (Śiva)
11	Tiruchendūr	Toothukkudi; Tamil Nadu	Murugan
12	Nāṭṭam	Dindigul; Tamil Nadu	Kailāsanātha; Śiva
13	Jāmbukēśvaram (Tirunavāikkāval)	Tiruchirapalli; Tamil Nadu	Jāmbukēśvara; Śiva
14	Tiruvaiyāru	Tanjavur; Tamil Nadu	Śiva
15	Vriḍḍhāchalam	Cuddalore; Tamil Nadu	Śiva
16	Not mentioned Identified as Kumbhakonam	Tanjavur; Tamil Nadu	Sāraṅgapāṇi; Viṣṇu
17	Kumbhakōṇam	„ „	Śiva (ĀdiKumbhēśvara)
18	Tiruvārūr	Tiruvarur; Tamil Nadu	Tyāgēśvara; Śiva
19	Pulli..(velur) identified as Pullirukkuvelur	Mayiladutturai; Tamil Nadu	Vaidyanāthasvāmi; Śiva
20	Tiruvīḍaimarudūr (Tiruvaṇamarudūr)	Tanjavur; Tamil Nadu	Śiva
21	Siyyāli (Sirkāli)	Mayiladutturai; Tamil Nadu	Śiva
22	Chidambaram	Cuddalore; Tamil Nadu	Śiva
23	Kāñchīpuram	Chengalpattu; Tamil Nadu	Viṣṇu (Varadarājasvāmi)
24	Kāśī, Trivēṇi (Benares)	Varanasi; Uttara Pradesh	Viśvanātha; Śiva
25	ŚrīKālahasti	Tirupati; Andhra Pradesh	ŚrīKālahastīśvara; Śiva
26	Tiruvaṇamalai (Tiruvaṇṇāmalai)	Tiruvannamalai; Tamil Nadu)	Śiva
27	unidentified	***	Śiva

to Murugan. Another important point to be noted here is that the paintings reflect the co-existence of both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava religious traditions as in the case of the painting of Kanchipuram in which we find the depiction of Viṣṇu temple and also a *liṅga* within a shrine associated with the figure of goddess Pārvatī on the left of the Śiva temple. The figures of Gaṇēśa and Subrahmaṇya are depicted in the temples dedicated to Śiva besides the other deities. Iconographically, the

temples of Śiva are invariably portrayed with the *liṅga* form in a separate shrine while the goddess is shown in another shrine. Besides the *liṅga* form, Śiva is represented in subsidiary shrines such as Bhikṣhātanamūrti, Vaṭuka Bhairava and Naṭarāja. Viṣṇu is depicted as Sēśhaśayana, Sāraṅgapāṇi in reclining pose, Bhōga Sthānaka form, and Ādivarāha forms. Murugan or Kārttikeya is portrayed in *sthānaka*, *āsīna* and *yānaka* forms. Mostly the goddesses are depicted in *sthānaka*

form within separate shrines in the case of Śiva temples with few exceptions. Goddess Viśālākshmi is depicted as seated in a separate shrine in the painting of the sacred centre of Kasi. It has been observed by Phyllis Granoff that the Puranic *Mahātmyas*, the texts that deal with the sacred places of Hindus most often refer to the geographical features of the sacred site rather than the images there (Phyllis Granoff: 2001:64). Therefore, since the main objective of the painters of Nattam was to include several pilgrim sites irrespective of the religious sectarian faith in and around the Tamil speaking regions we find the inclusion of many temples of Tamil Nadu in the mural paintings of Nattam that became popular through the local legends and *Sthala Purāṇas* by about seventeenth century.

According to the *Mahābhārata* (13.111.18), the places of pilgrimage are auspicious for the Hindus and it is due to the extraordinary power of the soil, water and visits of the sages. By visiting these places and performing the sacred sites the pilgrims will obtain religious merit or a transformation of their life situations. It is stated that through the combined processes of sacralisation, ritualisation and deeper interconnectedness, places become distinct 'Sacred places' or 'sacredscape'. In the epics, *Purāṇas*, *Dharmaśāstras* and *Sthala Purāṇas* 'tīrtha' is referred to as a place of pilgrimage and each temple is a 'tīrtha', especially consecrated as a crossing place between Heaven and the Earth (Kramrisch: 1946:3-17). The confluence of the rivers goes beyond the physical geography and creates visual geography of interconnectedness which binds all of India together and facilitates the rich tradition of religious pilgrimage between the key sacred sites in the landscapes (Eck: 2012:1-3). The state of Tamil Nadu in South India is well-known as the land of temples since it is marked by several *tīrtha kshētras* which are regularly visited by pilgrims. The waters of the river Kāvērī are considered as sacred as the waters of the river Ganges in North India and many temples are situated on the North and

South of the river Kāvērī. From the long list of sacred sites of the mural paintings of Nattam we can notice the temples of Chidambaram, Sirkali, Pullirukkuvelur and Tiruvaiyur lying North of the river Kāvērī while the sacred sites of Srirangam, Kumbhakonam, Tiruvidaimarudur and Tiruvarur are situated South of the river Kāvērī.

The concept of *PañchabhūtalīṅgaKshētras* represent the five elements of the Universe had been developed much earlier in South India. It is of interest to note that all the *Pañchabhūtasthalas* are included in the mural paintings of the temple at NattamKovilpatti. The *jalalīṅga* at Jambukesvaram, *Agni līṅga* at Tiruvannamalai, *Vāyulīṅga* at Sri Kalahasti, *Ākāśalīṅga* at Chidambaram and *bhūmilīṅga* at Kanchipuram are frequently visited by the devotees and sages as each of the sacred sites is bestowed with specific powers. The Tamil myths are closely associated with the origin of the temples, worship in the temples and in particular with the ritual pilgrimage (Shulman: 1980:17). In the Tamil temple myths each shrine claims to be the site of creation, the centre of Universe and the one spot where salvation is most readily obtained (Shulman: 1980:18). While discussing the sacred centres, Mircea Eliade states that 'every consecrated place is a 'centre', where hierophanies and theophanies can occur, and where there exists the possibility of breaking through from the level of the Earth to the level of Heaven' (Eliade: 1958:379). The hill, a tree or a temple through which the 'axis mundi' passes is considered to be a point of junction between Heaven, Earth and Hell. The manifestation of divinity in a temple, a hill or a tree along with the mythological legends makes the sacred where heaven and the Earth meet stand at the centre of the world. The network of the sacred places connected express a multitude of meanings such as spiritual practice and its connections with the territorial contours of 'tīrtha': i.e., rivers, trees, hills and temples. Besides this is a general principle of "symbolic reciprocity exists between the topographical context or configuration of the earth and the

religious image present at the pilgrimage sites” (Brennemann Jr.: 1993:205-12). Thus it is argued that ‘the religious image in its symbolism reflects and amplifies the topographical context and vice versa’ (Brennemann Jr.:1993:209). As discussed above the remarkable feature of the sacred sites shown in the mural paintings of Nattam Kovilpatti temple is that many of them are situated in the delta of the river Kāvērī and close to the water bodies. According to the descriptions given in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* (70.16.19) the sacred sites can be categorized in terms of their origin, location, motive, association and manifestation of power as the divine sites that relate to specific deities. On the other hand, based on the belief systems and practices as experienced by the pilgrims and those prescribed in the literary texts, the pilgrim centres are mentioned generally as water sites, hill sites, shrine sites, circuit areas or *kshētras* (Singh: 2006: 224). For example, Palani, Tirupparankunram, Alaghar Koyil and Tirupati are located either on top of the hills or at the base or near the hills. The temples of Ramesvaram and Tiruchendur depicted in the mural paintings are located close to the waters of the sea while Kasi and Prayaga are on the banks of river Gaṅgā and the confluence of the three rivers. Adding to the main structure of the temples portrayed in the mural paintings can be seen the temple tanks or *pushkarīṇis* as their water is also considered sacred by the devotees.

The iconography of the sacred sites depicted in the paintings of the Nattam temple comprises one or two and rarely, three shrines that enshrine the aniconic or iconic forms of the god and goddesses in different stances. Mostly we find paintings with two shrines of equal size or with different dimensions. Some of the paintings show elaborate architectural details that include the main shrine, some subsidiary shrines with deities inside, pillared enclosure walls surrounding the temples, passageways, water tanks and *sthalavṛikshas*. The background colour of the paintings is usually red and the figures of hills are drawn in half circles in black colour. Waters of

the sea are depicted in black colour with aquatic bodies. It seems that the local legends play a major role in defining the topography and iconography of the topographic images.

Alaghar Koyil, dedicated to lord Viṣṇu has the icon of Viṣṇu standing as the principal deity with the figures of his two consorts, Kalyāṇa Sundaravallī and Āṇḍāl in the main shrine (Fig.1.2). On the lower right corner, we find the seated figure of Yōga Narasiṃha in a subsidiary shrine and on the other side of the standing figure of Viṣṇu is the image of Karuppusāmi, the guardian deity of the temple. He stands with his left hand placed on a mace and his body complexion is blue. He wears a *dhōti* red in colour. Karuppusāmi is a regional and folk deity worshipped in Central Southern districts of Tamil Nadu, more particularly in the area of Madurai and Tiruchirapalli (Slaczka: 2016:65).

According to some scholars, Karuppusāmi is an incarnation of Viṣṇu or one of his aspects. He is often represented as the bodyguard of the principal deity and therefore subordinate to him. But generally we do not find the images of Karuppusāmi in the temples dedicated to Viṣṇu (Meyer: 2004: 99). Majority of the legends on the origin of Karuppusāmi are local ones and they connect the god to a particular place or temple. The legend of Alaghar Koyil refers to him as the treasurer and protector of the temple. On the other hand, we find the image of the deity in a small shrine in the temple dedicated to Murugan at Tirupparankunram which was expanded under the patronage of the Nayakas of Madurai (Branfoot: 2003:146-79).

The temple of Viṣṇu at Alaghar Koyil is situated at the foot of the hills and the topographic painting of the site shows the hills in the background and the peak of the hill has the figure of a bull with its head raised. This hill is called Vṛishabhagiri and from its body water flows which are contained in a small water tank. The Telugu label describes it as *Sōḷemalai Aḷugharsvāmi*. This painting reminds us of a legend contained in *Tiruvīḷaiyadal Purāṇa*, the *Sthala Purāṇa* of



Fig. 1.1: General view of the sacred centres-South Wing, Kailasanatha temple, Nattam Kovipatti



Fig. 1.2: Alaghar Kōyil, Vishnu with his two consorts. Nattam Kovilpatti



Mīnākshī temple at Madurai written by Paranjyoti in the sixteenth century CE. According to it, a ferocious cow sent by a Jain monk to destroy the city of Madurai fell in love with the bull (Nandi, the mount of Śiva) on beholding it. It died of love and was transformed into a mountain and Nandi left the place leaving his material form to commemorate the event (Seastrand: 2013: 83).

Next to the panel of Alaghar Koyil is the topographic painting of Tirupati (Fig. 1.3). In the centre of an ornamental frame is the standing figure of Viṣṇu with four hands carrying *chakra* and *śaṅkha* in the upper right and left hands respectively, while the lower hands are in *abhaya* and *varada hastas* respectively. In the temple of lord Vēnkaṭēśwara situated on top of Tirumalai hills, the main icon is shown as standing alone in *samapādashānaka* pose with *chakra* and *śaṅkha* in the upper two hands and the front right hand is in *varadamudra* while the corresponding left hand is in *kaṭyāvalambita* pose. But TAG. Rao has described that the front right hand is in *abhayahasta*, which is not true (Rao: 1972:271). On the top, left corner of the painting is the standing figure of Adivaraha within a small shrine and diagonal to it is the water tank. Here we find the deviation in the location of the Ādivarāha temple portrayed in the painting from the existing shrine of Ādivarāha. In reality, the Ādivarāha temple is situated on the North-Western bank of the temple tank (Rao: 1986: 24) but it is shown in the Southwest corner of the mural painting.

On the bottom left is a small shrine and a goddess is depicted seated on an elevated *pīṭha*. Since there is no subsidiary shrine for the image of the consort of Vēnkaṭēśwara in the temple complex, it is difficult to identify her as Goddess Padmāvātī, the consort of Vēnkaṭēśwara. On the other hand, the image of Vakuḷādēvī is found in the South-East corner shrine of the pillared circumambulatory hall surrounding the main temple. Therefore, the image can be identified as Vakuḷāmātā, mother of Vēnkaṭēśwara who according to the local legends oversees the activities in the kitchen as the temple attendants

cook the food offerings to the god. The background of the painting of Tirupati is in red and the hills are shown as semi-circles and the peaks of the hills are depicted in the form of the coiled serpent Ananta with its hood raised in the top right corner suggesting the *Śēshāchala* hills on top of which the temple of lord Vēnkaṭēśwara is situated.

The temple dedicated to Śiva in the name of Rāmaliṅgam at Ramesvaram (Fig. 1.4) is depicted next to the panel showing the temple complex of Tirupati. In this painting, *śivaliṅga* is depicted within a shrine and Pārvatī stands in a separate shrine with *abhaya* and *varadahastas* in the front two hands and the lotus flowers in the upper two hands. Only one *liṅga* is shown in the painting while there are two *śivaliṅgas* at Ramesvaram said to be installed by Rama, the epic hero and another one by Hanuman. The *liṅga* at Ramesvaram is considered one of the twelve *vyōtirlīṅgas*, where Śiva appears as a fiery column of light.

Two temples, one dedicated to Śiva at the foothills and another one situated on top of the hills to lord Murugan at Palani are depicted in two different panels. The temple of Murugan on top of the hill (Palanimalai) portrays the god in a shrine and Palani Āṇḍi in another shrine (Fig.1.5). At the bottom are depicted the figures of Iḍumban, Subrahmaṇya with a spear in one of his hands, a *śivaliṅga* and a donor or a devotee below the arches. The image of Iḍumban, an *asura* carrying the two hills - Śivagiri and Śaktigiri on a *kāvaḍi* that is thrown on his shoulder has some important religious significance. According to the myth of Palani (Shulman: 1980: 49), Murugan as a child killed the demon when he tries to move the hills where he resides by lifting the *kāvaḍi* and resurrecting him on the prayers of the wife of Iḍumban. This myth reveals the dwelling of Murugan at a specific site and the shrine to which the two hills belong and from which they cannot be uprooted.

The topographic painting of the temple at Madurai is comparatively the largest one among the ceiling paintings of the Kailāsanātha temple at Nattam Kovilpatti (Figs. 1.6 & 1.7).



Fig. 1.3 Lord Vēnkaṭēswara, Tirupati, mural painting, Nattam Kovilpatti



Fig. 1.4 Painting of Rāmēśvaram temple



Fig. 1.5 Mural Painting of Murugan temple at Palanimalai from Nattam Kovilpatti

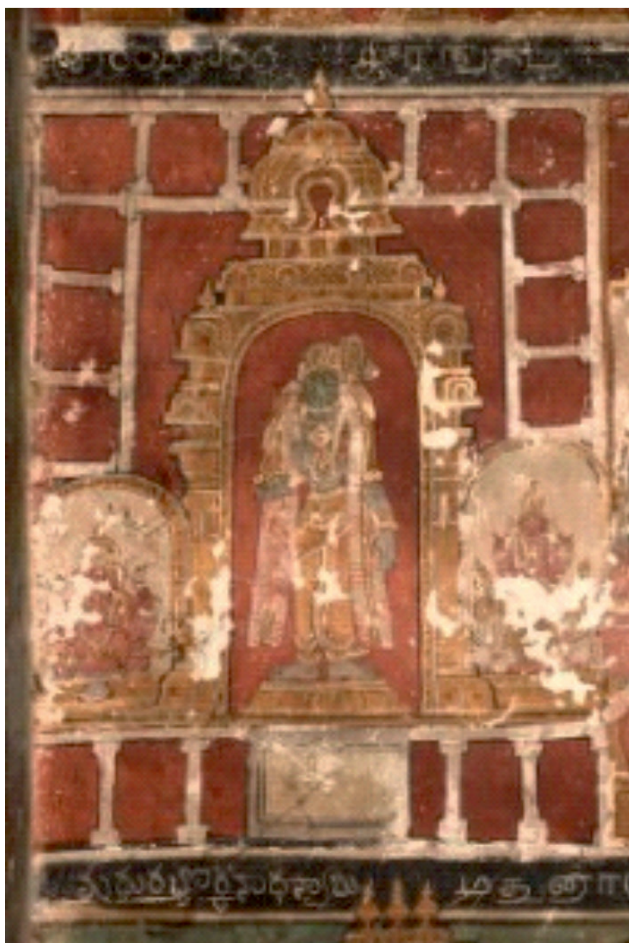


Fig. 1.6 Mīnākshī within a shrine, Madurai; Painting from Nattam



Fig. 1.7 Chokkanāthasvāmi and Gaṇeśa, Mīnākshī temple, Madurai

The temple of Śiva at Madurai is popularly known as Mīnākshī-Sundarēśvar. It is located on the southern banks of river Vaigai and is described as Chokkanāthasvāmi Madurai in the short label inscription written in Telugu. Like all the other paintings of the temple the background is done in red colour and the standing image of the goddess Mīnākshī with two hands is shown in a separate shrine on the left (Fig. 1.6), while the *śivaliṅga* is depicted in another shrine close to it. On either side of the shrine of Mīnākshī are the images of Gaṇeśa and Subrahmaṇya in two subsidiary shrines. Around the shrine of the goddess is a rectangular pillared hall. White colour is used to depict the pillars. A large image of seated Gaṇeśa is shown in the passageway between the shrines of the goddess and Śiva (in *liṅga* form) (Fig. 1.7). Gaṇeśa carries *paraśu*, *pāśa*, *mōdaka* and *abhayahasta* in his four hands.

The shrine of Śiva is supported by four elephants, two on either side with their trunks raised. An ascetic sits below the tree with his legs crossed and bent at the knees and feeding the elephant with a sugar cane. Seated figures of Śiva

and Pārvaṭī on an elevated *pīṭha* and the standing figure of Karuppusāmi are portrayed in the upper corners of the painting. The dancing figure of Śiva as Natarājamūrti on a pedestal encircled by a circular *prabhāmaṇḍala* that encloses the entire image of Śiva is depicted below the shrine of Śiva. On the right of Naṭarāja is the standing figure of Śivakāmī within a small shrine. On the left of Naṭarāja is a big water tank drawn in a square shape with several lines using black colour. According to the *Sthala Purāṇa* of the temple, it is Śiva in the guise of an ascetic exhibiting his miraculous power by feeding the stone elephant with sugarcane which eats it on the request of the king of Madurai (Seastrand: 2013:91). The architectural layout of the temple at Madurai and the position of the images installed in the shrines, the temple water tank and the relative position of the gods in the temple complex portrayed in the topographic painting generally agrees with the actual temple of Madurai. All the important features of a sacred site such as the icons, *sthalavṛiksha*, *Sthala Purāṇa* and the water tank connected with the temple are well displayed in the painting.

Thus the pictorial narrative of Śaiva, Vaishṇava and Murugan *tīrthakshētras* noticed on the South Wing of the ceiling of the *maṇḍapa* of *Kailāsanātha* temple minutely examined here reveals that these paintings as well as those on the North Wing provide the worshippers with a visual substitute for the pilgrimage sites rather than suggesting the route plan to reach these sacred centres. These topographic paintings discussed here comes under the category of ‘Monoscenic Narratives being in State’ as the narrative content is reduced and displays the scene in which action has already taken place as narrated in the temple myths (Barthes:1966:1-2). Further, they also come under the linear narrative as the main theme of all the paintings remains the same and each panel is shown within a separate frame. Like the *tīrthapaṭas* which generally lack physical accuracy the topographic paintings discussed here are also of the same kind and are not designed as a guide to the actual geography but enable the devotees to gain effective communion with the image of the sacred centres by visualising them so that they could accomplish the journey to those temple sites through their imagination.

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