

## Erotic Sculptures in the Vijayanagar Nayak Temples of Tamil Nadu

DR. P. Ganesan

Head And Chairperson, School Of Historical Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamilnadu.

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### ABSTRACT

Vijayanagara-Nāyaka temple's erotica is a much-coveted theme; this may be due to the rituals center on erotica or the need for śāstras and the fancy of the sculpture. There are no statistics on the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka temples in Tamilnadu. The temples have been selected on a random sampling basis from the four integral units of the Tamil country such as Toṇṭaināṭu, Koṅkunāṭu, Cōlanāṭu and Pāṇḍināṭu. The temples are dedicated to gods and goddesses of different sectarian lineages, such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Śākti and so on. The study involves a more comprehensive field study, random survey, and intensive analysis of the available erotic sculptures, which are made to study the sculptures available in different research conducted from time to time in the study area. The historic Andal Temple, Srivilliputtur, Annamalaiyar Temple, Tiruvannamalai, Avinashi Lingeshwarar Temple, Avinashi, Annur Manneshwarar Temple, Annur, Azhakar Temple, Madurai, Ekambaranathar Temple, Gangaikonda Cholaeswarar Temple, Gangaikonda Cholaeswarar, Kamakshi Amman temple, Kanchipuram, KoodalAzhagar Temple Madurai, KasiViswanathar Temple, Thenkasi, Kuduminathar Temple Kudumiyanmalai, Masilamaninathar Temple Thirumullaivoyal, Meenakshi Amman Temple, Madurai, Nellaiappar Temple, Tirunelveli, Sakkeshwarar Temple, Kanchipuram, Sri Sundra Varadaraja Perumal Temple, Uttiramerur, Thyagaraja Temple, Tiruvottiyur, Thirumuruganatha Temple, Thirumuruganpoondi, Thirukuttralanadhar Temple, Kuttralam, VaradharajaPerumal Temple, Kanchipuram.

### Introduction

Erotica is a bye-pass road as a major theme down to the early Medieval Art of Tamilnadu. Scholars who worked on the studies of temples in Tamilnadu paid casual attention as though it was a prohibited zone for entry. The needed attention is paid in this field. However, it is a significant task for a student of art history because, in almost all later medieval (or early modern) Vijayanagara-Nāyaka temples, erotica is a much-coveted theme; may be due to the rituals centring on erotica or need of śāstras and the fancy of the sculpture. There are no statistics on the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka temples in Tamilnadu.<sup>1</sup> The Nāyakas had their bases at Ceñci, Tañcāvūr and Madurai and concentrated on the resurrection of the temples earlier demolished by the Muslim iconoclasts and built several new temples.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the present study concentrates on some temples and presents a survey of erotic images.

### Temples Selected

The following temples have been selected on a random sampling basis from the four integral units of the Tamil country such as Toṇṭaināṭu, Koṅkunāṭi, Cōlanāṭu and Pāṇḍināṭu. The temples are dedicated to gods and goddesses of different sectarian lineages, such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Śākti, and so on. The temples are from the following places:

The study involves a more comprehensive field study, a random survey, and an intensive analysis of the available erotic sculptures. Attempts are also being made to study the sculptures available in different research conducted periodically in the study area. The historic Andal Temple, Srivilliputtur, Annamalaiyar Temple, Tiruvannamalai, Avinashi Lingeshwarar Temple, Avinashi, Annur Manneshwarar Temple, Annur, Azhakar Temple, Madurai, Ekambaranathar Temple, Gangaikonda Cholaeswarar Temple, Gangaikonda Cholaeswarar, Kamakshi Amman temple, Kanchipuram, KoodalAzhagar Temple, Madurai, Kasi Viswanathar Temple, Thenkasi, Kuduminathar Temple Kudumiyanmalai, Masilamaninathar Temple Thirumullaivoyal, Meenakshi Amman Temple, Madurai, Nellaiappar Temple, [Tirunelveli](#), Sakkeshwarar Temple, Kanchipuram, Sri Sundra Varadaraja Perumal Temple, Uttiramerur, Thyagaraja Temple, Tiruvottiyur, Thirumuruganatha Temple, Thirumuruganpoondi, Thirukuttralanadhar Temple, Kuttralam, VaradharajaPerumal Temple, Kanchipuram.

Andal Temple, Srivilliputtur.

Srivilliputhur Divya Desam is a famous 2000-year-old temple and one of the 108 [Divya Desams](#), the most

important abodes of [Lord Vishnu](#). It is the birthplace of two of the most essential [Alvars](#) in the [Vaishnavite](#) tradition: [Periyazhvar](#) and [Andal](#). The history of Srivilliputhur centres around the Srivilliputhur Temple dedicated to [Andal](#) (8<sup>th</sup> century or earlier), the only female Alvar of the 12 [Alvar](#) saints of South [India](#)<sup>3</sup>. Within the temple's [sanctum sanctorum](#) is an image of the Lord in a reclining posture; His consorts, Sri Devi and Bhoo Devi, are shown attending to him at His feet. Sage Bhrgu stands near His head, and Markandeya is near his feet. Images of Panchamurtis, Thumburu, Narada, Sanatkumara, Kinnara Mithuna, the Sun and the Moon are shown all around Rangamannar, as well as representations of Villi and Puttan, who stand reverently at His feet. The sanctum sanctorum has three doorways from which the Lord can be seen in His reclining posture.<sup>4</sup>

Annamalaiyar Temple, Tiruvannamalai

Tiruvannamalai is a town in the state of [Tamil Nadu](#). Tiruvannamalai is named after the central deity of the [Annamalaiyar Temple](#), Annamalaiyar. The [Karthigai Deepam](#) festival is celebrated on the day of the full moon between November and December, and a giant beacon is lit at the top of Annamalai Hill. Three million pilgrims witnessed the event. On the day preceding each full moon, pilgrims circumnavigate the temple base and the Annamalai hills in a worship called Girivalam, a practice carried out by one million pilgrims yearly.<sup>5</sup>

Avinashi Lingeswarar Temple, Avinashi

The historic Lingeswarar temple in Avinashi is in Tiruppur district, part of Coimbatore. Lord Siva is in the form of Lingam (Lingeswarar), the main idol of this shrine. One of the ancient structures, this temple holds a vibrant history. Sundrapandian of the Kongu Pandian dynasty originally built it at the end of the 12th century. Kongu Cholas built the present structure, and Krishna Raja Udayar of Mysore renovated it in the 17th century<sup>6</sup>. The main tower (Raja Kopuram) was damaged by lightning in 1860 and was newly built in 1980.<sup>3</sup> Most famed Avinashi Ther (chariot), said to be the second largest in South India, is the biggest festival where flocks of devotees gather to pull it on the streets.<sup>7</sup>

AnnurManneshwarar Temple, Annur,

The Sthala Purana relates that the temple was built by a Chera king from Chembium. It is said that a hunter dug the ground to pull out a root of "Valli" (tapioca). He was surprised to find blood bursting out of the root and manifesting itself as a Sivalinga endowed with wings.<sup>4</sup> The awe-struck hunter prostrated before the divine manifestation and prayed for grace.<sup>8</sup>

Azhakar Temple, Madurai

Thirumaliruncholai, or Azhakar temple, is a temple dedicated to [Lord Vishnu](#) situated 21 km from [Madurai](#), which lies in the [Tamil Nadu](#) state. When historical and original facts surface, people tend to treat them with reverence, as seems to be happening in Thenur, a village in the interiors, 20 km off Madurai city. Villagers here relive an event with much fanfare, which is believed to have been performed here four centuries ago.<sup>9</sup> The main event of this Festival is Kallazhakar getting down the river function. Lakhs of people gather in the Vaigai River to see this festival yearly. The architecture of the Azhakar temple corresponds to that of other south Indian temples, with large gopurams and pillared mandapams.<sup>5</sup> The gopuram of the Karuppa Swamy shrine depicts the passionate side of human relationships in the form of beautiful statues.<sup>10</sup>

Ekambaranathar Temple [Kanchipuram](#)

Ekambaranathar Temple, or Ekambareswarar Temple, is dedicated to Siva and is located in [Kanchipuram](#). The temple is the largest in Kanchipuram and is located in the northern part of the town. The temple gopuram (gateway tower) is 59m tall, one of the tallest gopurams in India<sup>11</sup>. It is one of the five major Shiva temples or Pancha Bootha Sthalams (each representing a natural element) representing the element -Earth. The other four temples in this category are Thiruvanaikaval Jambukeswara(water), [Chidambaram Natarajar](#)(Sky), [KalahastiNathar](#) (wind) and [Thiruvannamalai Arunachaleswara](#) (fire). It is one of the 275 [Paadal Petra Sthalams](#), where all of the four most revered [Nayanars](#) ([Saivite](#) Saints) have sung the glories of this temple.<sup>12</sup>

Gangaikonda Cholaeswarar Temple, Gangaikonda Cholapuram

The Gangaikonda Cholapuram was erected as the capital of the Cholas by Rajendra Chola I. Kadaram (Kedah in Malaysia) at the beginning of the 11th century C.E. It occupies an essential place in the history of India. As the capital of the Cholas from about 1025 C.E. for about 250 years, the city controlled the affairs of the entire southern India<sup>13</sup>. The Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple he constructed consisted of 3 stories and was surrounded by a substantial fort-like wall. The outer wall was largely destroyed during the English rule (1896), when the building material (granite rocks) was reused to construct the Lower Anicut dam built across the river Kollidam. Large bronze images were created to be carried outside the temple to participate in daily rituals, processions, and temple festivals. The round lugs and holes found on the bases of many of these sculptures are for the poles carrying

heavy images. They were admired for the sensuous depiction of the figure and the detailed treatment of their clothing and jewellery in Chola-period bronzes.<sup>14</sup>

#### Kamakshi Amman temple, Kanchipuram

The Kamakshi Temple is a famous temple dedicated to Kamakshi, one of the forms of the goddess Parvati. It is located in the historic city of Kanchipuram, near Chennai, and is popularly associated with Sankaracharya, one of the most significant Hindu gurus. The temple was probably built by the Pallava kings, whose capital was Kanchipuram, around 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E.<sup>15</sup> The main deity, Kamakshi, is seated in a majestic Padmasana, a yogic posture signifying peace and prosperity, instead of the traditional standing pose. The goddess holds a sugarcane bow and a bunch of flowers in the lower two of her arms, a pasha (lasso), and an ankusha (goad) in her upper two arms. There is also a parrot perched near the flower bunch. There are no other Parvati temples in the city of Kanchipuram.<sup>16</sup>

#### KoodalAzhagar Temple Madurai

The Koodal Azhagar Koil is a famous temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu in the centre of Madurai. Koodal is another name for Madurai, and Azhagar means the beautiful one in Tamil. The temple is ancient and very close to the famous Meenakshi Amman Temple. It is one of the 108 divyadesams the holy abodes of Vishnu. A beautiful Vishnu temple also has Navagraham (Usually Navagraham is found only in Sivan temple). The temple (Horse "haya" griva avatar) is the main deity<sup>17</sup>

#### Kasi Viswanathar Temple, Thenkasi

If Benares is [Kasi](#) of North, it is Tenkasi, Kasi of South, where Lord Siva resides to bless His devotees on the banks of river Chitraru. Worshipping Lord here is considered to be equal to that of worshipping him in Benares. This temple has a magnificent tower that stands 180 feet tall and is visible from kilometres away. The vast courtyard in front of the temple has lush green grass; in the background, we see the Podighai hills full of herbs and medicinal plants. A Mandapam leads one inside the main temple. Inside the sanctum resides the main deity, Kasi Viswanathar, a huge Sivalingam of exceptional grace and beauty.<sup>18</sup>

#### Kuduminathar Temple Kudumiyamalai,

Kudumiyamalai is located about 20 km from Puddukkotai town. The village is centre around a small hillock, where a cave temple has been carved on its foot. This cave temple, locally known as Melaikkovil, has been extended continuously during later times, and this place has held quite an importance in the past. We found many inscriptions in and around this temple, and this region would have enjoyed the continuous patronage from various dynasties that ruled over it. However, once bustling with social and cultural activities, at present, this is a small, idle village.<sup>19</sup>

#### Masilamaninathar Temple Thirumullaivoyal

In ancient times, the forest surrounding Thirumullaivoyal was occupied by two Kurumbars named Vanan and Onan. The king duly defeated the kurumbas and brought the two white-trunk pillars from their palace, which he used while building the temple for [Masilmaninathar](#). It is believed that the Lord supported him in destroying the Kurumbas by sending the Nandi. The unique feature of the temple is the Nandi facing eastward against Lord Shiva. Also, this is one of the few temples where the positions of the Lords are interchanged. This is believed to be because of the urgency in providing darshan to the local king.<sup>20</sup>

#### Meenakshi Amman Temple, Madurai

Meenakshi Amman Temple is a historic temple located on the southern bank of river Vaigai in the temple city of Madurai. It is dedicated to Parvati, who is known as Meenakshi, and her consort, Shiva, named here as Sundareswarar. The temple forms the heart and lifeline of the 2500-year-old city of Madurai. The complex houses 14 gateway towers called gopurams, ranging from 45-50m in height, the tallest being the southern tower, 51.9 meters (170 ft) high, and two golden sculptured vimana, the shrine over the sanctum of the main deities.<sup>21</sup>

#### Nellaiappar Temple, [Tirunelveli](#)

Nellaiappar Temple is one of the famous [Siva Temples](#) at the heart of [Tirunelveli](#). The temple of Swami Nellaiappar and Sri Kanthimathi Ambal is in the city's heart. According to the Puranas, the Gopurams were built by Muluthukanda Rama Pandiyan and the other essential parts of the temple were constructed. The Mani Mandapam, with its famous musical pillar, was built by Nindaraseer Nedumaran in the 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Originally, the Nellaiappar and Kanthimathi temples were two independent structures with spaces in between<sup>22</sup>. It was in 1647 C.E. that Thiru Vadamalaiappa Pillaiyan, a great devotee of Siva, linked the two temples by building the "Chain mandapam". There are several stone inscriptions in the temple. The most important are those of Veerapandiyan, who reigned about 950 C.E., and those of Rajendran I and Kulothunga Chola I. The inscriptions

of Maravarma Sundara Pandiyan refer to the Lord as "Woodayar" and "Wodeyanayanar" and the Goddess as "Nachiar". From the inscriptions of Kulasekkara Pandiyan, we learn that he defeated the Chera, Chola and Hoysala kings and built the outer walls of the temple with the war booty.<sup>23</sup>

Sokkeshwarar Temple, Kanchipuram,

Sokkeshwarar Temple is situated near the Kamatchiamman Temple in Kanchipuram. It was constructed by the Chola King and is called the Sokkeshwarar Koyil. Gowsikan is devoted to the temple and is recognized as "Gowsikam." This temple is known as the god Sri Gowsikeshwarar. In 985 C.E., inscriptions mention that King Uthama Cholan built the temple, which is famous for the "Theirkkirunthu Nakkar Kovil." This temple was magnificent and entirely sculpted with stone. It was divided into Arthamandapam Mugamandapam<sup>24</sup>

Sri Sundra Varadaraja Perumal Temple, Uttiramerur

Uttiramerur is a small [town](#) situated near [Chennai](#) (Madras). Uttiramerur, once known as Chaturvedi Mangalam (a city with people knowledgeable of all 4 Vedas viz Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharvana, followed a highly organized democratic system). Uttiramerur is located near from [Kanchipuram](#). It is known for its temples, which were built over 1200 years ago by the [Pallavas](#) and [Cholas](#). The Pallava king Nandivarman II established it around 750 C.E. It was ruled by the Pallavas, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Sambuvarayars, the Vijayanagara Nayaks and the Nayaks.<sup>25</sup>

### 1.1 Thyagaraja Temple [Tiruvottiyur](#)

1.2 Thyagaraja Temple at [Tiruvottiyur](#) (also called Vadivudai Amman Temple) is dedicated to [Siva](#). It is located in [Tiruvottiyur](#) in northern [Chennai](#), [Tamil Nadu](#). The temple is revered by the [Tevaram](#) hymns of Saiva [nayanars](#), the 7th-century [Tamil](#) saint poets and classified as [Paadal Petra Sthalam](#). The temple is closely associated with the saint poets [Sundarar](#) and [Pattinathar](#).<sup>26</sup> The temple has been in vogue since the [Pallava](#) times of the 7th century and widely expanded by [Chola](#) kings during the 11th century. The temple has a seven-tiered gateway tower and a tank. The temple parallels the [Thyagaraja temple](#) in [Tiruvarur](#) as Rajendra Chola I expanded both, and both have Siva's same dance pose.<sup>27</sup>

Thirumuruganatha Temple, Thirumuruganpoondi

Thirumuruganpoondi is a [panchayat town](#) in [Tirupur District](#) in [Tamil Nadu](#). The village's name is derived from the famous [Murugan](#) temple located here. The temple dates back to the 9th Century. The origin of the temple is rooted in legendary antiquity. Soorapadma, the scourge of the gods with his entourage of demons, struck terror in the celestial world with his sudden depredations and campaigns<sup>28</sup>. The persecuted gods approached Lord Siva and implored him to save their lives. The holy shrine is also associated with Sundaramurthynayanar, one of the most celebrated saints of Saivism. He did a pilgrimage to the sacred shrines of Siva in Kongunadu.<sup>29</sup>

Thirukutralanadhar Temple, Kutralam

Thirukutraalanaadhar Temple is in the middle of the mountains at the foot of the Main Falls. This temple is one of the ancient temples in South India. The main idol of this temple is Lord Siva, who is named "Thirukootachalanathar" or Kutralanathar, and the Goddess is "Kuzhalal VaiMozhi" (Goddess Parvati)<sup>30</sup>. Parvati's shrine is also significant here and is regarded as one of the 64 Shakti Peethams. The temple also houses the shrines of Ganesh, Murugan, Siva Linga, Nagraja and Sivakami. Tirugnana Sambhandar sang the temple's glory. The Sthala Vruksham (tree) of the temple is Kumarampala. The great saint Agasthiyar is worshipped in Thirukutraalanaadhar Temple.<sup>31</sup> This temple contains many inscriptions about Chola and Pandya Kings.

VaradharajaPerumal Temple, Kanchipuram.

Varadharaja Perumal Temple, Hastagiri, or Attiyuran temple, is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and is located in the holy city of [Kanchipuram](#). It is one of the [Divya Desams](#), the 108 temples of Vishnu believed to have been visited by the 12 poet saints, or [Alwars](#). The Ekambareswarar and Kamakshi Amman Temple in Kanchipuram are popularly known as Mumurtivasam (abode of the trio)<sup>32</sup>. There is a belief that the temple was first built by the [Pallava](#) king [Nandivarman II](#). Varadharaja Perumal Temple was initially built by the [Cholas](#) in 1053, and it was expanded during the reigns of the great [Chola](#) kings [Kulottunga Chola I](#) and [Vikrama Chola](#). In the 14th century, the later Chola kings built another wall and a gopura.<sup>33</sup>

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