

# Pancha Bhutha (Five Elements) Sthala Temples In South India –A Study

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**Abstract:** *Temples are found throughout India Particularity in Tamil Nadu and they have retained their significance, importance and popularity through the ages. South Indian temples are representing in its expressions and expressing a new phase spiritual advancement and mental evolution*

*South India temples especially Tamil Nadu Siva temples are fascinating in their beauty and highly imposing in their appearance. And also they are representing the macrocosm [the universal] and the microcosm [the inner space]. Temples not only the centre of religious activity but also serve the focus for the cultural and Social activities of the town which encompasses them and village surround them Temples are regarded as eradles or nursery beds of fine arts. The temples festivals provide the necessary inspiration for different artists and craftsman to display their skill in arts and crafts.*

*The temples is the product of the religious quest that seeks to bring the religious spirit to spread social activities. The design and construction, the forms and its structure and decoration, the rituals performed all of these are determined by our ancient people.*

*Pilgrimage to the sacred shrines is undertaken by the devotee notably for the worship of the deities enshrined there in and also for Spiritual spheres. These sacred temples and theerthams are associated with several legends and myth and they are an integral part of our cultural heritage. The temples is distinguished form house hold shrine not only in its structure and organization but also in its rituals and forms of worship.*

*The symbolism of the various forms, images, idols, icons and sculpture of the Siva temples is really a representation of religious and Philosophy wisdom and spiritualism.*

*The Siva temples elucidate the aesthetic significances, not only that but also they represent the philosophical, religious, socio cultural values of the people. Generally speaking all temples express the devotion and piety to people Siva temples have same special features of its own. The ancient Siva temples in Tamil nadu with their massive and expansive construction abounding in admirable architectural development full of sculptural splendors, their hoary antiquity, impressive sanctity natural locality serene beauty and own whelming divinity ,inspire people from all over the world and infuse piety in their hearts. The spiritual and grateful vibrations in Siva temple attract and arrest the people, and invest them with a spiritual splendor. There are 275 paadal Petra sthalalngal of Lord Siva. Among them the panchabhuda sthalangal are important for both religious pilgrims enbires which provide as immense pleasure and divine enjoyment. The sight and visit to this temple give spiritualism. The pancha bhuda sthala temples are the foundation of all the activities which are related to the human beings.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The temples is designed to dissolve the boundaries between man and the divine. Not merely his abode, the temple is God therefore by implication the universe is identified with temple designed and the actual fabric. Tamil Nadu is replete

temples the Tamils of Tamil Nadu are of great antiquity and many of them have been existing form even before the beginning of the Christian are. The Nayanmars of saivism who sponsored the bhakti movement among the masses and the classes toured far and wide visited every nook and corner of the country, and sanctified hundreds of temples in

TamilNadu and outside TamilNadu by this sacred songs. Such temples are 275 in number and they are known as paadal petra Sthalangal. Among the 275 Saiva temples the followings are called Pancha bhutha Sathalangal. Chidambaram [Akasa] Srikalakhasti [Air] Thiruvannamalai [Fire] Thiruvaniakaval [Water] and kanchipuram [Earth] are same of them.

## II. PANCHA BHUTA [FIVE ELEMENTS] STHALA TEMPLES

Pancha bhutha sthalas are representing the Maha bhutas or the five great elements. These temples representing the natural elements of Akasa, Air, Fire, water and Earth. Lord Siva manifested in the form of Akasa. Air, Fire water and Earth in the respective places.

The five primary elements of creation, namely Pancha bhutas which are the constituents of nature, called Prakrti, are Earth [Prithivi]. Water [Appu] Fire -light [Thejas], Air [Vayu], and Space [Akasa]. God, who utilizes them for creation by an instant of his will, is called purusa. In short not Purusa is the instrumental cost and prakrti, is the material cause of the creation of this universe. The prevalence of God s present and his power in all the constituents of prakrti account their power. Hence purusa is the real material cause through illusion or maya creates a feeling that Prakrti is something distinct.

As symbols of the prevalence of his power in the pancha bhutas, lord Siva dwells in five shrines called Pancha linga kshetras. They are kanchipuram Prithivi lingam Thiruvanaikaval Appu lingam and Thiruvannamalai Jothi lingam, Sri Kalahasti Vayu lingam and Chidambarm Akasa lingam.

These temples are held in great esteem and reverence by all people and attract thousands of pilgrims even today from all parts of india and abroad. The architectural beauty, the sculptural splendor and the massive buildings such as gopuram, vimanas mandapam theertham, Sthalavirucham etc. of these temples, plunges us all in to wonder and admiration. The mere sight and visit to these temples are heart thrilling and soul inspiring. They purify our mind, elevate our thought and sublimate our very life.

Temple is the most characteristic expression of Hinduism. Providing a focus for both the social and spiritual life of the community and also it represents the religion and art its rice goes back to a very remote past. The temple reflects the ideals and the way of life those who built it and for whom it was intended to operate as a link between the world of man and that of the god.

We may hold that Siva temples is turbines of divine energy or grace. It has been said that the Siva temples is like the power station that stores electricity and distributes among the people. It store up divine power and makes it available for all who resides in the area in which it is situated.

In Hinduism the attainment of Spiritual Perfection is linked to a long journey of many stages, frequently visualized as a Progression upwards through various stages of consciousness like with the temples is conceived as a place of transit, a ford or crossing place. The temple is almost an electric plant form which he charges himself with emotion,

energy and ideas for the life began the outer circuit of the temple.

Nopilgrim is complete without visiting these Pancha bhutha sthala temples. A careful study of these temples Will suffice to Confirm that he temple should expose of beauty and harmony.

The five temples are dedicated to lord Siva. All these temples are located in South India with four of these temples in Tamil Nadu and one is located in Andhra Pradesh. The five elements are believed to be enshrined in the five lingams and each of the lingams Siva in the temple have five distinct names based on the elements they represent.

This World is ruled by the five basic elements that are Water, Fire, Space, Wind and Earth. We can't do anything without of this element. Where lord Siva is in these forms is called Pancha bhuta sthalangal. Now we shall see the Pancha bhuta sthalangal shortly.



Figure 1: Kanchipuram

Kanchipuram Ekambareswarar temple is one the famous temples dedicated to Lord siva in kanchipuram. It is one of the five major Siva temples or Pancha bhuta sthalams representing the element Earth. This vast temple is one of the most ancient temples in India having been in existence since 600 AD the temples covers an area of over 40 acres, Rajagopuram is one of the tallest in south. A notable feature of the temple is the hallway with an array of 1,008 Siva lingams. Its sthala virucham is a 3,500 year old mango tree whose branches are said to yield four different types of mangoes.

Thiruvanaikaval is a famous Siva temple in Tiruchirappalli. Thiruvanaikaval is one of the Pancha bhuta sthalams representing Water. Jambukeswara is depicted sitting under a jambu tree, which grows over a small



Figure 2: Thiruvanaikoval

stream that engulfs the deity during the rainy season. The massive outer wall, known as the vibudhi pirakara, stretches over a mile long and is two feet thick and over 25 feet in height; Legend has it that the wall was built by siva along with the labourers. The sannadhi of Goddess Akhilandeswari and the sannadhi, of prasanna vinayaka are in the shape of the pranava mantra called Aum. It is believed that people who go round the sannathi, which is in the shape of Aum 12 times and for one full mandala, 48 days will get the blessing of the Goddess Akhilandeswari and lead a good, healthy and wealthy life. It is believed that the Amman in the temple was very angry and hence during one of adi sankara's visit he installed the prasanna Ganapathy idol right.

Thiruvannamalai is home to the Annamalaiyar temple. Thiruvannamalai has long been associated with many yogis and siddhars. Thiruvannamalai is one of the Panchabhuta sthalam representing the fire element. One the day of karthigai deepam, a huge lamp is lit in a cauldron with three tons of ghee at the top of the Annamalai hill. Every full moon night, tens of thousands of pilgrims worship Siva by circumambulating the Arunachala hill barefoot. Advaita Vedanta Guru Ramana Maharshi lived in Thiruvannamalai for 53 years until his death in 1950.



Figure 3: Thiruvannamalai

Even before the dawn of Hinduism as we know, Thiruvannamalai was, as it centuries to be an important place of pilgrimage eternal Holy mountain which is the manifestation of Siva, holy Sri Arunachala, Annamalai is Lord Siva Himself from beginning less bottom to endless top, the one limitless self, a sense of mass jnana.

Lord Arunachala Siva ruled over the premises and grants his grace to all who honour him, that is why pilgrims from all over India always come here, year after year, in hundreds of thousands. It is one of the important as well as significant temples in south India. The Tamil word Annamalai is a combination of two terms Anna and Malai means inaccessible Malai means hill. Hence Annamalai means inaccessible hill. Lord Siva described by saint Gnanasambandar as Annal. In Sanskrit the word Arunachala is the combination of two terms Aruna and Achala which means red and immovable mount so.



Figure 3: Sri Kalakshasti

Sri Kalakshasti is one important ancient Siva kshetrasor Siva temples. It is fairly close to the famous hill temple of Lord Venkateswara in Tirupati. This is where the popular textile painting art called kalamkari originated. It is believed that Kannappa also known bhakta Kannappa, a tribal devotee worshipped Lord Siva at Sri Kalakshasti Brahma, the Hindu God of creation is said to have worshipped Lord Siva and bathed in the Swarnamukhi river to get rid of 'suhathya patakam' the sin of killing children. It is one of the Panchabhuta sthalam representing one of the five base elements Vayu sthalam or Air linga. There is a lamp burning inside the inner sanctum that constantly flickers despite the lack of air inside. The sanctum has no window, and the lamp flames keep moving despite no air movement. The linga is white and is considered swayambhu or self manifested.



Figure 5: Chidambaram

Chidambaram Nataraja temple is one of the Panchabhuta sthalam representing space. The ancient Chidambaram Nataraja temple is dedicated to Lord Siva in the form of the cosmic dancer and is the oldest temple in southern India. The 1000 pillared hall the Nritya Sabha or court is carved out like a gigantic chariot. Saints Sambanthar, Tirunavukkarasar, Sundaramurti Swamikal, Manickavasagar and Nandanar attained Mukti in Chidambaram. Bharathanatyam dancers from different parts of the world offer their prayers to Lord Nataraja during the famous annual Natyanjali festival.

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