



Metaphysical Meaning *of* Dravidian Temple Architecture

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The very basic core of Dravidian Saiva Temple has three components. They are

1. **Siva-lingam or the main deity.** It represents the one and the only God. The metaphysical term PATHI denotes the God. PATHI means the solo head, leader, Lord or proprietor.
2. **The Bull in front facing the main deity.** It may be the bull or lion in Amman temples, peacock in Murugan temples and mouse in Pillaiyaar temples. It represents the soul, in particular the soul which has turned away from the worldliness and focused on God. The word PASU denotes the soul. It arises from the word **Pach** – meaning bond; **pasu** means bonded souls. In Tamil, **Maadu** (மாடு) means bonded – **maaddup-paddathu** (மாட்டுப்பட்டது). The nose of the bull is at the same level of the middle portion of the lingam or deity which represents the naval. It indicates that the breath of the soul focused on the God is the one giving life to the deity. Without the attention and worship of the soul, the deity is just inert stone. It is the temple rule that no one goes between them.

3. **The sacrificial Alter on the front.** It represents the bondage or fetters binding the soul. The word PAASAM means the binding fetters of the soul(s).

Once these three eternal entities of Saiva Siddhanta (philosophy of Saivam) **PATHI, PASU, PAASAM** represented by the Lingam/ deity, Bull and the sacrificial alter are there, the basic structure of the Temple is complete.

4. **Thiru manthiram** song describes the eternal everlasting nature of these three entities as follows.

பதிபசு பாசம் எனப்பகர் மூன்றில்
பதியினைப் போற்பசு பாசம் அனாதி
பதியினைச் சென்றணு காபசு பாசம்
பதியணு கிற்பசு பாசம்நில் லாவே.

**They speak of the Three entities - Pathi, Pasu and Pasa;
Beginningless as Pathi, Pasu and Pasa are;
But the Pasa binding Pasu nears not the Pathi supreme:
Let but Pathi approach! the Pasa of the Pasu is as naught.**

- **Thiru Manthiram 115**

5. **Thiru manthiram** song describes Pathi-Pasu-Pasam Relationship Symbolised in Temple as follows.

ஆய பதிதான் அருட்சிவ லிங்கமாம்
ஆய பசுவும் அடல்ஏறு எனநிற்கும்
ஆய பலிபீடம் ஆகும்நற் பாசம்ஆம்
ஆய அரன்நிலை ஆய்ந்துகொள் வார்கட்கே.

**The Pathi (Lord) is the Gracious Siva Linga,
The Pasu (Jiva) is the mighty bull in front stands,
The Pasa (Bond) is the altar;
Thus, in the temple, The Lord stands,**

For them that seeking to see.

- Thiru Manthiram 2411

6. Extended Complete Temple Architecture

All other paraphernalia can be added to the above-mentioned three basic elements of a Temple over times as the resources become available. The Saiva scriptures of **Agamas** prescribe extended Temple architecture for further expansion which also continues to host many deeper metaphysical meanings. The extended temple represents the whole human body. This explains the very basic truth of 'God is within us.' Thiru-manthiram describes it as follows.

உள்ளம் பெருங்கோயில் ஊனுடம் பாலயம்
வள்ளற் பிரானார்க்கு வாய்கோ புரவாசல்
தெள்ளத் தெளிந்தார்க்குச் சீவன் சிவலிங்கம்
கள்ளப் புலனைந்தும் காளா மணிவிளக்கே.

For the Bounteous Lord

This heart is the sanctum holy,

The fleshy body is temple vast

The mouth is the tower gate;

To them that discern,

The soul is Sivalinga;

The deceptive senses are but the lights that illumine.

- Thiru Manthiram 1823

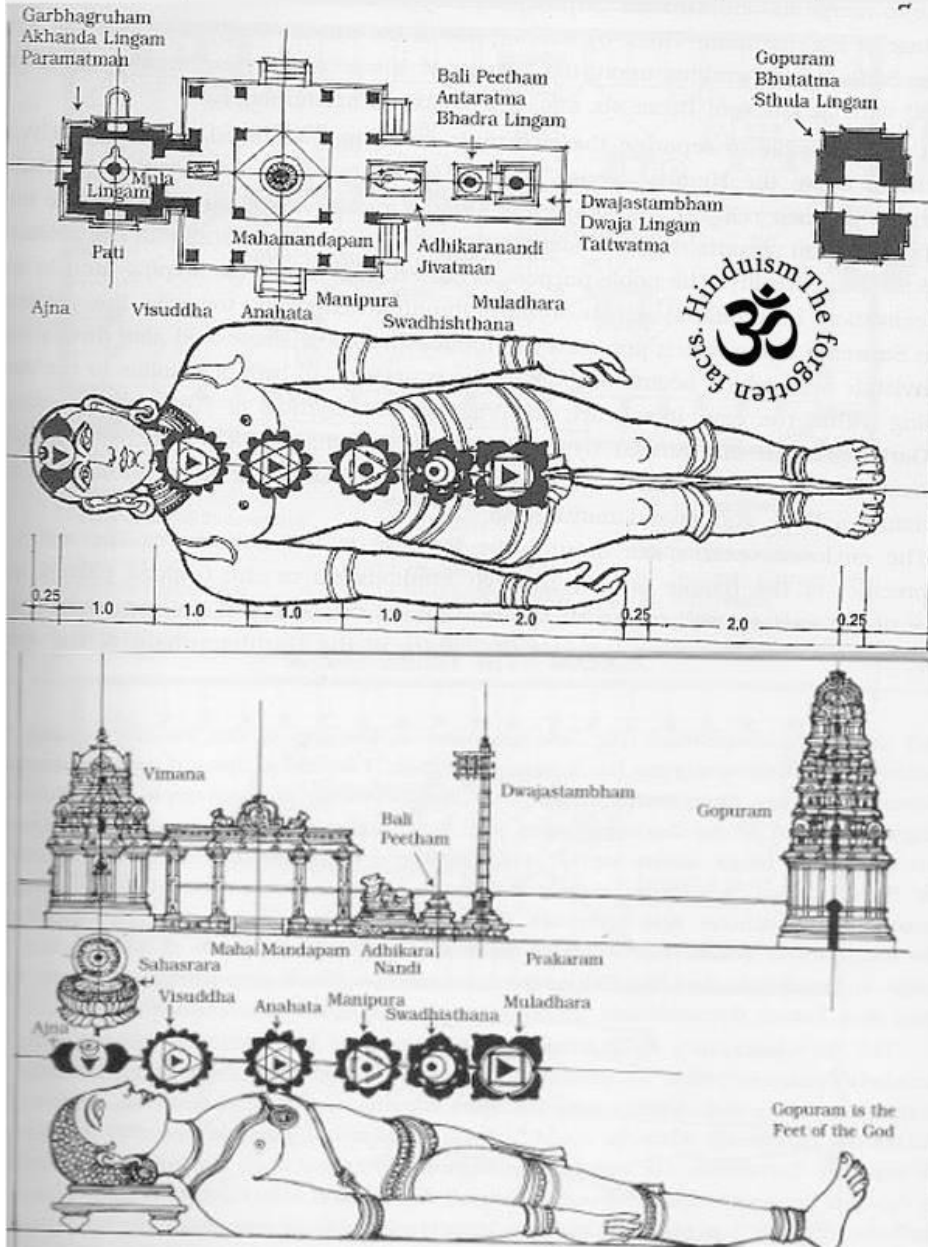
7. The **Karpa-giraham/ Sanctum sanctorum** is the smallest room in the temple. It has the Lingam or the main deity. It is completely dark as it is covered on three sides by the wall and has a small entrance at the front. This room represents the head of the human body. We know head is the important part in the human body which controls everything. The tower above this is called **vimanam**.
8. The deity in the dark room of Sanctum sanctorum is covered by a curtain on the front. The deity represents the God. The darkness in the room and the veil on the front represents the primal fetter **ANava**. When the priest unveils

the curtain and shows the lighted lamp, we can have a glimpse of the deity. It means when the Guru comes and removes our darkness of ignorance by the light of wisdom, we can envision the God. (Nowadays temples keep the Sanctum sanctorum always bright by lightings and even focus lights and have broad door at the entrance to have a complete and broader view of the deity without knowing the meaning of the darkness and narrow door of the Sanctum sanctorum).

9. The narrow part connecting the Sanctum sanctorum to the next room on the front is called **-antharALam**. It may or may not be reflected on the outer wall. This part represents the neck in our body, connecting the head to the rest of our body.
10. The broader room in front of this is called **arththa mandapam**. From here the priests starts offering his puja to the deity. From here, associate priests give helping hand to the chief priest to do the puja. This part represents shoulders in our human body.
11. The wide room in front of this is **Maha Mandapam**. It has an additional entrance on the south side (in east facing temples). It houses the deity of Nadarajah, the dancing Siva facing south in Sivan Temples. It will be Arumugan, the six faced deity in Murugan temples. It may also host Sakthi, the consort of the God represents His Power which is Grace. In some temples they do have either Nadarajah or Sakthi alone. This part of the temple represents our chest. The dancing Siva closer to the northern wall facing south entrance represents our anatomical heart. Dance of Siva represents the beating of the heart. Sakthi represents power and movement and also represents the beating of the heart. There are deeper metaphysical meanings for the form of dancing Siva, which are not mentioned here.
12. The Bull facing the main deity is on the front. It represents our soul. Here it represents the mature soul detached from the worldliness and focused on the God. Metaphorically the soul is stationed at the chest.

இருமுலை நடுமார்பு அடிவயிறு இதன்மேல்
இருமுடி பொருளுள் நிறம்பல இவற்றுள்
ஒரு பொருள் ஆம்பல் அரும்பென உள்ளே

Hindu Temple and the Structure of Human Body: Comparison



இருவிரல் வலத்தே இருப்பது இதயம்.

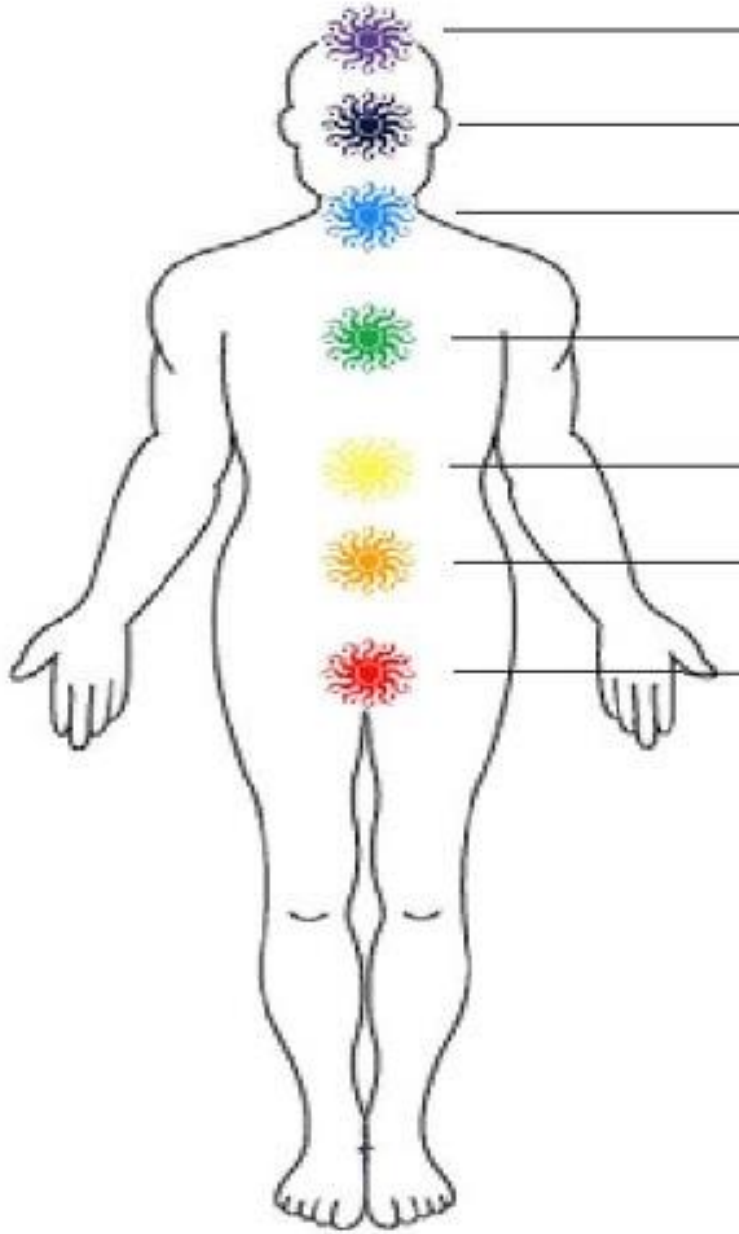
Soul, the Lotus heart is situated above the belly
 In the mid-chest, in between the nipples
 Two fingers right to the mid-line

- Ramana Rishi Song

13. The sacrificial alter is placed after the bull. It represents our belly. It also represents our carnal desires. We enter real worship only after sacrificing our carnal desires. There after only we can become focused on God rather than on the world like the mature soul – the bull in front. You need to cross the carnal desires to become the mature soul focused on the God. **Saiva Siddhantam** says the thing we need to sacrifice is the fetters which binds us and separates us from the Truth, the God.
14. The **kodi-thambam**, the flag pole in front of the sacrificial alter has many more metaphysical meanings not mentioned here. The flag pole in the temple represents the phallus in human body.
15. **Kundalini Yoga** is represented in the flag pole. Among the mystic six chakras in the human body, the base of the flag pole represents **MoolAdAra**, the triangular shape perineal Chakra situated in between the genitals and anus in our body. The deity of this chakra is Pillaiyaar, who is usually situated within the carved out triangular space in the base of the pole. He is called **kodi-thamba- pillaiyaar**. (Temples are making a small protruding Pillaiyaar space at the base now without knowing this). Focusing on chakras, doing pranayama, the yogic breathing, chanting piraNava peeja mantra - **AUM**, and meditating on Ganesha, a serious seeker can raise the kundalini, the sleeping serpent in **MooladAra**, and direct it upwards through the middle channel **sushumna nAdi** among the three, breaking through the knots in between, passing through the **swathistana** – the pubic chakra, **maNipooraka** – the naval chakra, **anAkatha** – the heart chakra, **visutthi** – the neck chakra and **Agjna** – the mid-brow chakra before finally reaching the Siva at thousand petal **sahasrAra** – the head chakra to enjoy the Bliss of Siva- Sakthi union is the Kundalini Yoga. The flagpole represents the spine and the chakras on the way. Rising to the **dwa-dasAnda** – the final chakra 12 fingers above the vertex is represented by the top part of the flag pole rising above the roof level. This is also called **meethaana**. (Temples are now getting the roof higher to cover the top without realizing this).

ஆதாரத் தாலே நிராதாரத் தேசென்று
மீதானத் தேசெல்க உந்தீபற
விமலற்கு இடமதுஎன்று உந்தீபற.

Go through the six chakras based in the body
To reach beyond to the baseless MeethAna chakara



That is the place for the
Unblemished Lord.

- ThiruvunthiyAr 08

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Duwa-dasAnda Chakra /
MeethAna chakra

Sahasrāra Chakra

Agjnā Chakra

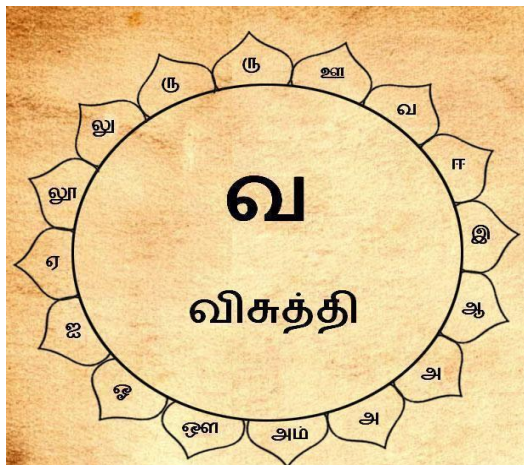
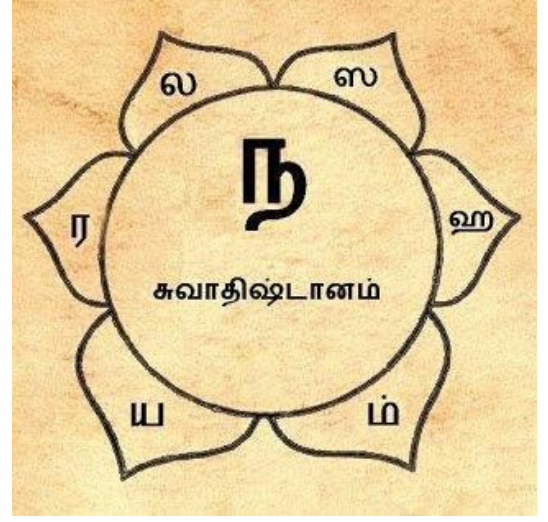
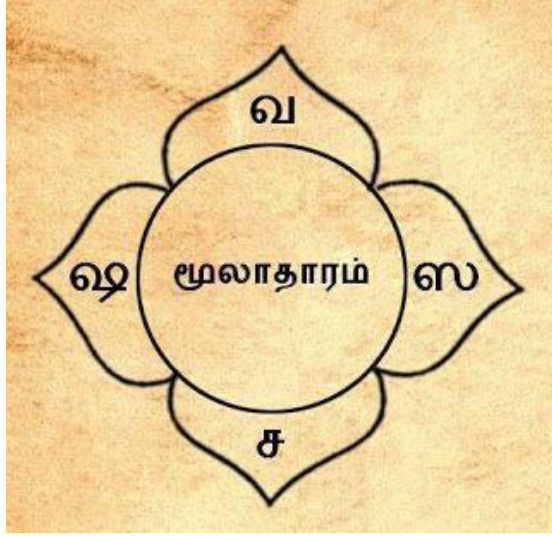
Vishuddhi Chakra

Anāhatha Chakra

Manipūraka Chakra

Swāthistāna Chakra

Mūlādhāra Chakra





16. The souls are infinite in number, and they are not created, says **Saiva Siddhanta**. They are plunged in the **AaNava**, the prime fetter of darkness of ignorance from the time eternal. They all have the innate capacity to know and enjoy but in need of opportunity. God, through his five cosmic functions of creation, sustenance, dissolution, obscuration and grace provides this opportunity for each and individual soul by providing them bodies, instruments, worlds and objects there to explore in different types of births while without leaving them at the same time without interfering with their free will. Souls mature through the experience realizing enough is enough in this world at last to turn toward the God. Then He gives them Himself, to enjoy His state of endless Bliss – **Aananda**, Intelligence – **Jnana** and Love – **AruL** or Grace. This is called **Mukti**, the final release of the soul.
17. The bottom part of the flag pole represents the souls in pre-cosmic state, means the state of the souls waiting to come to the world. They haven't taken any birth yet. They are in complete darkness. This is called **kEvala** or lonely state of the souls.

அறிவிலன், அமுர்த்தன், நித்தன், அராகாதி குணங்க ளோடும்
செறிவிலன், கலாதி யோடும் சேர்விலன், செயல்கள் இல்லான்,
குறியிலன், கருத்தா அல்லன், போகத்திற் கொள்கை இல்லான்,
பிறிவிலன் மலத்தி னோடும் வியாபி கேவலத்தில் ஆன்மா.

Imperishable soul in its pre-cosmic state of

kEvala before the births, is
Formless, aimless, action-less,
Unintelligent entity as it does not have any
will - raaga, action – kalā, mode – guNās or
Any other evolutes - tatwās, and as such
Has no self-direction, enjoyment or experience
And is entirely pervaded (vyāpi) by the
Conjoined primal fetter of ĀNava mala,
From the time eternal.

- Siva Jnaana SiddiyAr 228

அறிவின்றி முத்தன் அராகாதி சேரான்
குறியொன் றிலாநித்தன் கூடான் கலாதி
செறியுஞ் செயலிலான் றினங்கற்ற வல்லோன்
கிறியன் மலவியாபி கேவலந் தானே.

Soul in pre-embodied state of kEvala has no knowledge
No form, no desire, no contact with the evolutes of
Volition - the rāga and conation – the kalā etc.
No action and hence he is not an agent
Completely deluded and pervaded by the primal fetter ĀNava.

- Thiru Manthiram 2247

18. The middle part of the flag pole represents the cosmic state of the souls in the recurrent cycles of birth and deaths. They have some knowledge and insight as per their experience and maturity but not full. This is called **Sakala** state of the souls.

உருவினைக் கொண்டு, போக போக்கியத்து உன்னல், செப்பல் ,
வருசெயல் மருவிச், சத்தமாதி அம் விடயம் தன்னில்
புரிவதுஞ் செய்து, இங்கு எல்லா யோனியும் புக்கு, உழன்று,
திரிதரும் சகல மான அவத்தையிற் சீவன் சென்றே.

Souls in the embodied state of sakala avastha,
Clothed in body-mind-sense complex,

**Indulge in the objects of enjoyments
By its thoughts, words and deeds and
Take births into eighty-four hundred thousand varieties of species
Of various cosmic worlds and wander again and again.**

- Siva Jnaana SiddiyAr 229

**உருவற்றுப் போகமே போக்கியந் துற்று
மருவற்றுப் பூத மனாதியான் மன்னி
வருமச் செயல்பற்றிச் சத்தாதி வைகிக்
கருவுற் றிடுஞ்சீவன் காணுஞ் சகலத்தே.**

**The soul in the state of sakala,
Befitted with suitable body,
Begets objects of experience and enjoyments
Conjoined with gross elements and instruments
Attached to its karmic deeds, along with subtle elements
Enters the cycle of births,**

- Thiru Manthiram 2261

19. The top part represents the realized state of the souls united with the God.
This is called **Suddha** state of the souls.

**இருவினைச் செயல்கள் ஒப்பி; ஈசன் தன் சத்திதோய,
குருவருள் பெற்று, ஞான யோகத்தைக் குறுகி, முன்னைத்,
திரிமலம் அறுத்து, பண்டைச் சிற்றறிவு ஒழிந்து, ஞானம்
பெருகி, நாயகன் தன் பாதம் பெறுவது, சுத்தமாமே.**

**Once the mature soul reaches the state of
Karmic equanimity for the twin deeds of good and evil,
The salvic potency of the God descends on him.
So blessed with Guru's grace,
Progressed in Jnāna, the Intelligence
And be freed from the triple fetters.
He ceases to be finite in his intelligence, and
Becomes omniscient as he is merged to the feet of the Lord.
This is the liberated state - suddha avastha - of the soul.**

- Siva jnana siddhiyAr 230

இருவினை யொத்திட இன்னருட் சத்தி
மருவிட ஞானத்தில் ஆதன மன்னிக்
குருவினைக் கொண்டருட் சக்திமுன் கூட்டிப்
பெருமலம் நீங்கிப் பிறவாமை சுத்தமே.

The state of equanimity of karma comes,
The divine grace descends on the soul,
That get sealed in the pedestal of Supreme Intelligence - jnāna;
Through the divine preceptor; due to his Supreme Love - Grace,
The primal fetter ĀNava departs,
The soul becomes free from births,
Thus, the soul in suddha state.

- Thiru Manthiram 2262

20. Flag Hoisting ceremony – **kodiyEttram** and festival during Temple **Mahotsava** – Annual festival represents the God’s Grace through his five cosmic functions raising the souls of **kEvala** state in the complete darkness to the ultimate free state of endless Bliss – **Suddha** state through the **sakala** state of cycles of birth and deaths.

கேவல சகல சுத்தம் என்று முன் றவத்தை ஆன்மா
மேவுவன் கேவ லந் தன் னுண்மை,மெய் பொறிகள் எல்லாம்
காவலன் கொடுத்த போது சகலனாம், மலங்கள் எல்லாம்
ஓவின போது சுத்த முடையன், உற் பவம் உடைத்தே.

The causal or subtle states of the souls are three,
called kEvala, sakala and suddha.
The soul is in kEvala when it is by itself
without any volition, activity or enjoyment.
sakala is the state when the God provides the soul
With body-mind-sense complex, worlds and objects for experiences.
When the soul is freed from all blemishes of mala - the fetters
It is pure - suddha - state and there are no more births.

- Siva Jnaana SiddiyAr 227

அந்த மலம் அறுத்து இங்கு ஆன்மாவைக் காட்டி அதற்கு
அந்த அறிவை அறிவித்து அங்கு - இந்தறிவை
மாறாமல் மாற்றி மருவு சிவப் பேறென்றுங்
கூறாமல் கூறக் கொடி.

**Cuts off the veiling fetters and shows the true nature of the soul
Confer the Supreme Intelligence of PATHI JNAANA by replacing the
Individual intelligence of the souls – PASU JNAANA and
Bestows the Supreme state of Siva-hood is signified by the Flag hoisting.
- Kodik kavi**

21. There is **SandEsa** deity on the south of sactum sanctorum facing the Sanctum near **kOmugi** – the protruding drainage part from the Sanctum. He is the one of the foremost devotes of the God. Any temple worship without paying respects to him last is vain as per the Temple rules. No one should go in between as there should be no interruption in the grace he is enjoying incessantly from the God by the way of all our offerings to the God. It means no worship of the God is meaningful without attending to the devotees. Deity, Guru and Devotees are the triple expressions of the God in Saivam as **Guru, Linga, Sangama**.
22. The single corridor around the Sanctum sanctorum represents the limbs of the human body.
23. Some temples have three rounds of corridors around the Sanctum sanctorum. These three rounds of corridors indicate three layers or bodies covering the soul described in Upanishats. 1. physical body the **sthUla sareera**, 2. subtle body – the **sUkshuma sareera** and 3. the causal body – the **kAraNa sareera**.
24. Bigger temples have five rounds of corridors which represents the five layers of clothing or bodies of the souls. 1. Physical body – **anna maya kOsa (sthUla sareera)**, 2. vital body – **prANa maya kOsa (sUkshuma sareera /subtle body /)**, 3. psychic body – **manO maya kOsa (GuNa sareera)**, 4. Intellectual body – **vijnAna maya kOsa (kanchuga sareera)** and 5. Causal body – **Ananda maya kOsa (kAraNa sareera)**. The last three bodies together are also called the causal body – **kAraNa sareera**.



25. The entrance tower of the temple represents the feet in the Human body.

26. There are deeper levels of understanding to each detail of the temple architecture which are intricate and complex and make themselves available for serious spiritual seekers reaching further up.