

## [Chidambaram](#)

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# Chidambaram

Miracles and moksha are Chidambaram's speciality. Overcome by the temple's power, worshippers are drawn into the depths of their own soul. The result is inner awakening, miraculous experiences, and at times complete liberation from rebirth.

## The Metaphysical Greatness of Chidambaram

All temples convey mystical truths through their architecture, images, stories, rituals and pageantry. But somehow Chidambaram, because of its age, association with great yogis and the unbroken devotion of its priesthood, has unparalleled power in awakening the devotee. Here is the home of the fifth of the elemental Lingams of air, earth, fire, water, ether. This Akasha Lingam, representing Siva as beyond form, is simply the empty space in a room beside Siva Nataraja in the Chitsabha, known as Chidambaram Rahasyam or "secret." All that one finds here are a yantra and golden arch decorated with bilva leaves. Another profound object of worship here is the Moksha Linga, a clear crystal again representing Parasiva, worshiped six times a day. It is said this Lingam was given to the Dikshitaras by Lord Nataraja Himself, who hardened the rays coming out of the crescent moon on His head.

But the most ancient and foremost attribute of Chidambaram is that at this very place Supreme God Siva as Nataraja performed and continues to perform the Dance of Bliss for the release of all souls from bondage. Begun in formless stillness, His movement creates form, and subsequent movements destroy the previous forms. At the end of the dance, when He stops, there is again stillness, with no form created or destroyed. How to witness such a dance? The various saints spoke at length about this mysterious process, a combination of devotion and yoga. Chidambaram, they said, is not an outside place, but within the highest chakras of man himself. Such is the mystery of the dance, and the mystery of God Realization.

So we go to Chidambaram to seek this personal experience of Supreme God Siva.

The Yajur Veda's Svetasvatara Upanishad explains Lord Siva's nature, "All this universe is in the glory of God, of Siva, the God of love. The heads and faces of men are His own, and He is in the hearts of all. He is the never-created creator of all: He knows all. He is pure consciousness, the creator of time, all-powerful, all-knowing. He is the Lord of the soul and of nature and of the three conditions of nature. From Him comes the transmigration of life and liberation, bondage in time and freedom in eternity."

The classical interpretation of Chidambaram's famous four-armed Siva Nataraja form is given in the Chidambaram Mummani Kovai, a scripture specifically on this temple. "O my Lord! Your hand holding the sacred drum has made and ordered the heavens and earth and other worlds and innumerable souls. Your lifted hand protects the multifarious animate and inanimate extended universe. Your sacred foot, planted on the ground, gives an abode to the tired soul, struggling in the toils of karma. It is Your lifted foot that grants eternal bliss to those that approach You." The Sivasutras of Vasugupta, from the Kashmir school of Saivism, say, "The dancer is the Supreme Self."

Saint Tirumular 2,200 years ago revealed what has remained the most profound exposition of Siva's dance. In the 8th chapter of the 8th tantra of Tirumantiram, he says: "Siva is omnipresent with His grace remaining omnibenevolent. Everywhere is the Holy Form, Siva-Sakti, Chidambaram and the Divine Dance. Five are the dances of Siva: the Dance of Bliss, Dance of Beauty, Dance in the Golden Hall and the Wondrous Dance. When He danced that Dance of Bliss, the Vedas, the Agamas, the seven melodies, the seven universes, the five elements and all the entirety of worlds danced. When the Lord danced, the devas, asuras, humans, siddhas, vidyadharas, the three primal Gods, the three and thirty other Gods, the seven rishis, the several faiths and all, all creation, moveable and immovable, joined Him in the dance.

"Siva's Dance of Bliss defies description, as a red ruby, He dances the pure golden dance in flourishing Tillai, in the jewelled Golden Hall, in the remote divine light and in Sivananda bliss. The vision of Siva's Dance in the Golden Hall creates an intense effect. He blesses the yogi and controls him. The yogi is steeped in transcendental bliss. The goodly Dancer of Jnana [wisdom] Dance makes him sit still and impassive, and then He resides within him. Having witnessed the holy dance, you no longer

hanker after worldly pleasures and desires. The confusing thoughts and sorrows that worry you are dispelled.

"To the beat of the rhythmic measure that arises there, Sankara dances within the central sushumna nadi. Then He enters and abides within you forever. He danced His nine dances for jivas [souls] to revel and saktis to delight. He danced in forests, in the thoughts of His devotees, in the junction of sushumna and in endless jnana. Thus did He dance and dance in progression from jiva within to jnana in the endless Void. Siva's spheres of dance within are the central spinal column (Meru), the two nadis-ida (left) and pingala (right), jiva's delta-shaped junction at ajna chakra and the sushumna cavity at the top that is like the forest of Tillai. Ida and pingala are the land of Mount Meru and the land of South that is further beyond. Sushumna cavity is the Holy Hall, where the Lord of the Crescent Moon performs His divine Dance of Bliss. Thus do the frontiers of the vast universe lie-all encompassed by His Dance.

"In the ajna center astral space between the eyebrows abides the luminous mantra `Aum.' Verily, that is the holy temple of Chidambaram. The vast universe, the cluster of tattvas, the Sadasiva, the central sushumna, the sathavi sakti, the sambhavi sakti, the kundalini sakti-these serve as the seven pedestals for the Transcendental Being to perform His Holy Dance. Your birth cycle is snapped when you seek the varied dances, the songs sung and the forms the great Gurupara assumes. They who full know that the Guru within, that dances in the holy temple of Chidambaram, is Form-Formless, will surely receive His divine grace the jnana way."

Saint Appar too extolled the preciousness of this vision. "If you could see the arch of His brow, the budding smile on lips red as the kovvai fruit, cool matted hair, the milk-white ash on coral skin, and the sweet golden foot raised up in dance, then even human birth on this wide earth would become a thing worth having. Brahma and Vishnu worship Him every day with flowers and incense and sandal paste, for even they could not behold His form. I, who have seen with these eyes the cloth of silk on the ash-smearred God in Tillai's Golden Hall, have nothing left to see."

The Magical Miracles of Chidambaram

Many famous miracles have occurred at Chidambaram, both of inner transformation and of outer magic. The first of the miracles would be that of Sage Vyaghrapada himself. He was sent by his father, Rishi Madhyantinar, from the Himalayas to the "earthly abode of Lord Siva where more blessings could be attained from Lord Nataraja than through a great many yogic feats." Once settled in the forest of Tillai trees which became Chidambaram, the sage encountered difficulty in acquiring fresh flowers for his daily worship of the Srimulanadar Siva Lingam. Hence he prayed to Lord Siva for the tiger's hands and feet to climb and the tiger's eyes to see in the dark. The wish granted, he would scale the highest of trees to pick the choicest flowers in the pre-dawn darkness. He and his fellow hermit, Sage Patanjali, are said to still reside in the inner worlds at Chidambaram.

Chidambaram temple has the latest puja of any temple in India, ending near midnight. All other temples close earlier, it is said, so the Gods can come to witness Siva's dance. One devotee, not believing this, hid near the temple entrance before the last puja. And to his amazement, he did indeed see all the Gods arriving!

The 9th-century saint, Manikkavasagar, composed many songs about Chidambaram. While living there, he was challenged by a Buddhist king to defend his Saivite beliefs in debate with an eloquent Buddhist monk. Even though Manikkavasagar refuted all his points, the monk refused to concede defeat, upon which Manikkavasagar prayed to Siva for the Goddess of Speech to depart the monk, rendering him dumb. The astounded king then challenged Manikkavasagar to restore speech to his daughter, who had not spoken since birth. The saint subjected the girl to a series of questions. Her reply became the famous song Tiruchazhal. As a result of this miracle, the Buddhist king, the monk, his followers and the king's people all converted to Saivism.

It is said Manikkavasagar attained merger with Siva in the Chitsabha. So, too, did many other Saiva saints, such as Tirunilakantar, Kochengan Cholan, Ganampullar, Kurruvar, Maraijnana Sambandar, Hiranyavarman, Vyaghrapadar, Patanjali, Upanmani, Vyasa, Nandan and Sukar.

Nambi Andar Nambi lived in the 10th century. When he was a boy, it became his duty one day to perform puja at a shrine to Lord Ganesha. Being young, he expected the God to actually eat the food offerings that were made. When He did not, Nambi started crying and imploring Ganesha to eat. Finally Ganesha came and ate the food. Nambi's father did not believe this and came to see for himself. Once

again Ganesha came at Nambi's behest and ate the offerings. So when the Chola king, Rajaraja I, desired to recover the many missing songs of the Saiva saints, he sought Nambi's assistance. Nambi prayed to Lord Ganesha, who revealed that the manuscripts were locked in a secret room at Chidambaram. Their miraculous rediscovery was a tremendous event in the modern history of Saivism. The many Devaram songs about Chidambaram and Lord Siva's dance have served as enduring testimony attracting generations of pilgrims and establishing Chidambaram as the foremost center of South Indian Saivism.

During festivals, the great temple car is taken out and pulled through the streets by thousands of devotees. One year it had rained so heavily, the car became stuck in the mud. Suddenly everyone heard a booming voice commanding the devotee Sendanar to sing. As soon as he did, the car began to move and continued on without anyone's pulling the ropes. This song became part of the Tirumurai, the collected hymns of the Saiva saints.

In early days the Dikshitaras used to leave a copper plate at the shrine of Swarnakala Bhairavar each night. In the morning it would be changed to gold. Unfortunately, this miracle no longer happens.

Miracles at Chidambaram are not only for saints or ancient times. Just last year a woman in the nearby village of Attippattu was suffering a severe disease requiring major surgery. There was a strong possibility she would not survive. The Dikshitaras advised her husband to light ghee lamps every Sunday near Nataraja. When the day came for the surgery, new x-rays were taken, and to the marvel of one and all there was a complete absence of disease. No surgery was required.

In 1983 a team of geophysicists mapping the Earth's gravity field told devotees that the town had the highest reading they had so far encountered anywhere on the earth. Objects here are heavier than anywhere else.

Just to be in Chidambaram is a miracle, and one not limited to Hindu devotees. A local Muslim man recently said, "No matter where I go I do not experience the extraordinary feeling which I get only in Chidambaram." The area is noted for its complete communal harmony, not broken even when trouble broke out elsewhere in Bharat. "The peace here is unique," said a Hindu man, "You live here for 10 days

then you would know what I mean." Perhaps this is why the Tamils say, "To attain salvation, one should be born in Tiruvarur, die in Benares, think of Annamalai and live in Chidambaram."