

5 A Territory for the Goddess: the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*

The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (KV) presents the most uniform and balanced approach to Kāñcī's sacred geography as far as the three Māhātmyas in focus are concerned. In its description of Kāñcī, the KV precisely reflects the geo-spatial dimensions of Kanchi and at the same time interprets them to define various spaces around and within the city and to introduce selected sacred sites. The aspect of spatiality is central to the text and provides a conceptual representation of the sacred landscape that prioritises structure over style and narrative. Inscribed within a Śākta framework, the textual structure and the design of the sacred geography in the KV equally consider the Śākta, Śaiva, and Vaiṣṇava traditions and their sites. In particular, the three deities Varadarāja, Ekāmrānātha, and Kāmākṣī and the locations of their sites in Kanchi are structuring elements. The text itself can indeed be considered a literary account of Kanchi, one that selectively describes the sacred geography of Kanchi, highlighting Ekāmrānātha, Varadarāja and Kāmākṣī. A further characteristic element are glorifying *phalaśruti* statements that tell about the benefits of the sacred places—especially the *tīrthas*. In that, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* appears to be a text addressed to pilgrims visiting the sites, who are thus informed about salvific powers of the same.

5.1 Situating Kāñcī

The spatial design of Kāñcī's sacred geography in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is characterised by a clear-cut approach and an apparently carefully considered construction. It is downright schematic, supported by a uniform text structure, and an often simplistic-recurring wording. After an opening chapter in which Kāñcī is introduced and located (KV ch. 1), the text is divided into three parts: a Vaiṣṇava part focusing on Varadarāja (chs. 2–5), a Śaiva part on Ekāmrānātha (chs. 6–9), and a Śākta part on Kāmākṣī (chs. 10–13). Each of these parts is equally structured in four chapters: the first chapter contains an outline of a territory in Kāñcī assigned to one of the three deities

mentioned above and introduces the sacred places within that area; the second chapter gives the myth of the divine symbol that is conceived as the characteristic element of the site respectively associated with Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, or Kāmākṣī; the myth of the main deity is dealt with in the third chapter; and the origin of a sacred body of water important to the myth and space of the deity is recounted in the fourth chapter (see subsection 3.3.2 for details). Of particular interest for the analysis of the sacred geography are the introduction (KV ch. 1), which characterises Kāñcī as place of the Goddess, and the respective first chapter of each part (KV chs. 2, 6 and 10), which I collectively call “geography-chapters”. In these three chapters, sacred places in the spaces of Ekāmranātha, Varadarāja and Kāmākṣī are mapped; the other chapters mention only a few of these sacred places, according to their mention in the myths. The geography-chapters present the text’s concept of Kāñcī and display an orientation towards geo-spatial aspects rather than mythological interpretations. The sites of Ekāmranātha, Varadarāja, and Kāmākṣī are considered the most significant and as such are not introduced in the geography-chapters. Their location is specified in the description of Kāñcīkṣetra in the first chapter of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (see pp. 150–151) and their myths are detailed in separate chapters (KV chs. 4, 8, and 13).

The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* begins with the introduction of Kāñcī’s character and place, establishing the perspective on the city and the geo-spatial framework (KV 1.1–93). First and foremost, Kāñcī is characterised with the help of the concept of (Śakti-)pīṭhas (seats), the sacred places of the Goddess. Lists of such sites in varying numbers and in diverse localisations are found in Purāṇic and particularly tantric texts but are not canonised.¹⁷⁶ The KV, while suggesting several sets of *pīṭhas* in certain numerical configurations, explicitly names three sites as the most important on earth (KV 1.6c–9). These are Kāmarāja, Jālandhra in the Jvālāmukhī region, and Oḍyāṇa in the Kāmarūpa region. The three so named sites may be identified with Kanchipuram, Jawalamukhi (Himachal Pradesh), and supposedly a site in the former Kamarupa region (modern Assam).¹⁷⁷ The triad of *pīṭhas* named in the KV is reminiscent of a tradition of a set of four Goddess sites corres-

176 For details in the context of Kanchi, see Schier 2018, 134–137 and section 2.4. See Eck 2012, 267–270, 289–299 for an introduction to the concept of the *pīṭhas*, and the study by D. C. Sircar (1973) for a detailed analysis.

177 As the texts on the *pīṭhas* themselves differ in the naming and identifications of the site and the residing goddess, the above correspondence indicates a very likely interpretation in this context (for a discussion on this topic, see Sircar 1973, 11–17). T. V. R. Chari (1987, 61) offers an alternative interpretation

ponding roughly to the four cardinal regions of India, which is found in different constellations of sites in tantric text sections about the *pīṭhas* (Sircar 1973, 11–17).

In these sets of traditionally four *pīṭhas*, Kāmarāja is frequently named as one site, although it is usually identified not with Kanchi but with the former region of Kamarupa in the present Northeast India (Sircar 1973, 13, 13 n. 1). Kerstin Schier (2018, 134–137) notes that while some tantric texts also mention Kanchi as *pīṭha*, the association of Kanchipuram with the Śakti-*pīṭhas* is more recent and the identification of Kāmākṣī as *pīṭha* begins to appear in publications only from the second half of the twentieth century. The reason for this may partly be the growing renown of the goddess Kāmākṣī as propagated by the late Chandrasekharendra Saraswati (d. 1994), former head of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, the monastic institution managing the temple since 1842 (Venkataraman 1992, 70; Schier 2018, 125, n. 27). As Kerstin Schier further states, the conceptual link of Kanchi with the Śakti-*pīṭhas* seems to be stronger than the religious practices at the Kāmākṣī Amman or any other Goddess temple in Kanchi would suggest. The mention of the *pīṭhas* in the KV may well be a reflection of the primarily literary promulgation of Kanchi as *pīṭha*. The KV as a text is older than the publications mentioning Kāmākṣī as a *pīṭha* to which Kerstin Schier refers, the earliest available edition was published in 1889. However, there are indications that the Māhātmya is not much older than its first print edition (Buchholz 2022, 20; see also pp. 85–89). It therefore stands to reason to see the contextualisation of Kanchi as *pīṭha* in the Māhātmya in light of a process shaping the notion of Kanchi as sacred site and of Kāmākṣī as seat of the Goddess (Devī), which seem to have intensified in the second half of the last century.

According to the KV, Kāmarāja is located in Kāñcikṣetra (the region of Kanchi; KV 1.10ab) with the name indicating a link to Kāmākṣī. While the introduction of the KV only implies this specification, later chapters clearly express that it is Kāmākṣī who resides at the *pīṭha* in Kanchi.¹⁷⁸ Through the concept of the seats of the Goddess, the Māhātmya thus firmly constructs the

and identifies Oḍyāṇa with Jagannātha, that is, the Jagannātha temple in Puri, Odisha.

178 [introductory verses] *jagatkāmakalākāraṃ nābhisthānaṃ bhuvah param | padapadmasya kāmākṣyā mahāpīṭham upāsmāhe ||* KV 10.1 *iti stutvā namaskṛtya pīṭhaṃ tat kāmanāmakam |* KV 10.2ab.
 [Mārkaṇḍeya tells:] *atha tatra nṛpaśreṣṭha kāmakoṣṭhadharātale | gāyatrīmaṇṭape tatra bilapīṭhāsane śubhe ||* KV 12.3 *gāyatrīyomkārakoṇe sā kāmākṣī var-tate sadā | ādiśaktis svayaṃ vyaktā sarvaviśvasya kāraṇam ||* KV 12.4 *pad-māsane niṣaṇṇā sā kāmāpīṭhanivāsini |* KV 12.5ab.

idea of the city as a place of Devī and Kāmākṣī as the goddess of the *pīṭha*. This sets the underlying Śākta framework for the rest of the text.

5.2 The City in the Region

Apart from the classification of Kāñcī in the context of the seats of the Goddess, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* situates Kāñcī in a broader geographical context. In contrast to the other two Māhātmyas, the broader localisation does not take place within the framework of an initial mythical conception of the world (cf. sections 4.1 and 6.2), but solely on the geographical level. Besides, the focus is placed on the regional context, for which three spaces are outlined. The pan-Indian localisation is limited to the Gaṅgā (Ganges) as reference site for Pūrvasindhu (Bay of Bengal)—two hundred *yojanas* to the south of the former—with which the geographical contextualisation of Kāñcī begins in the text (KV 1.11). In the first geographical reference, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* corresponds to the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(V)), which similarly locates Kāñcī two hundred *yojanas* south of the Gaṅgā (see section 6.2). Since there is no regional site mentioned yet in the Māhātmya to indicate the location of the ocean, a North Indian sacred river is used as a geographical reference site. The mention of the Gaṅgā as the only non-regional site in this context could be understood as an expression of an all-India sacred geography in which the river is an essential element. After all, the Gaṅgā is one of the most revered rivers in Hindu traditions and a popular pilgrimage destination. The geographical aspect in relation to Kāñcī, though, seems to be just as relevant: The Ganges flows into the Bay of Bengal in the present Indian state of West Bengal and in Bangladesh, which already marks a location of the ocean. Starting from there, the conceptualised position of Pūrvasindhu, the first regional site, can be more precisely recorded and better utilised for the following regional contextualisation.

To this end, three spaces are outlined. They all surround Kāñcī and are of different dimensions, each marked by four border sites. These places are roughly positioned in the four cardinal directions and located clockwise one after another, usually starting in the east. In a centripetal movement, the description begins with the largest space and continues with the next smaller one, with each space seemingly constructed to fit into the next larger one (see figure 5.1). All spaces outlined in the KV appear to be deliberately

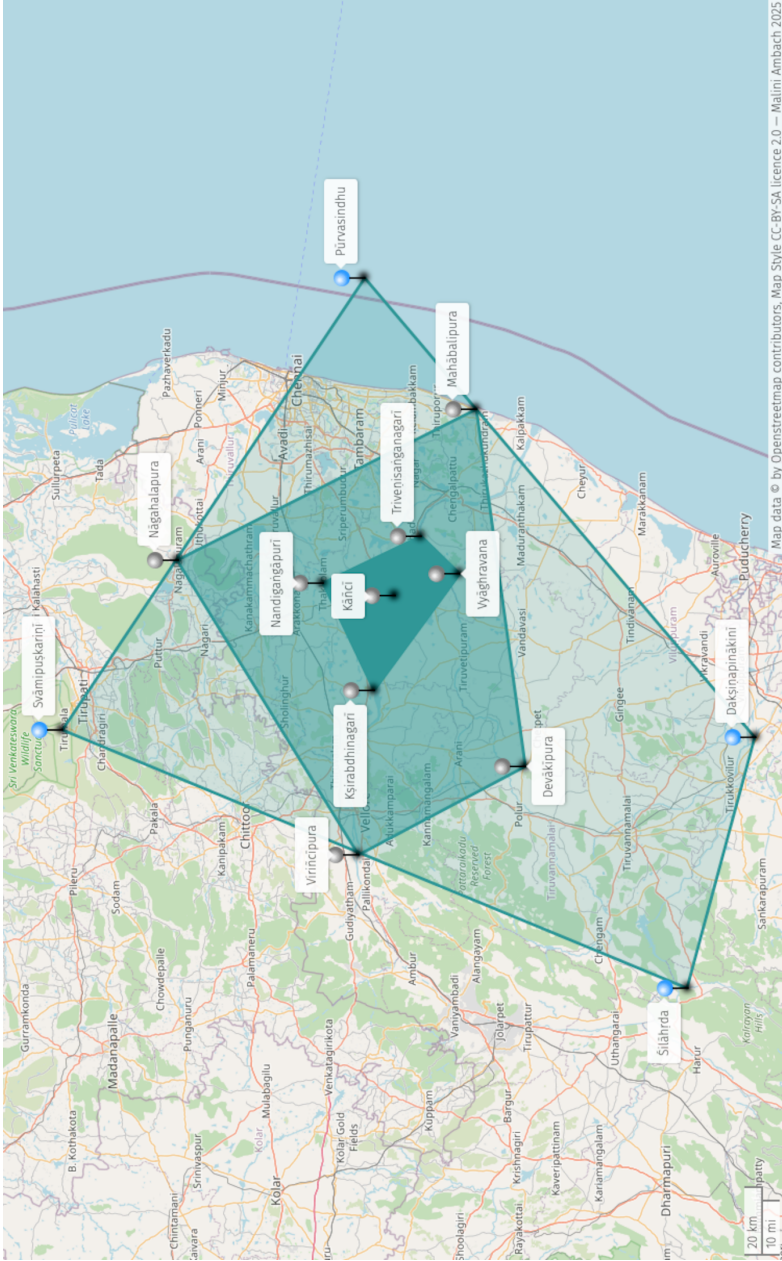


Fig. 5.1 The spaces around Kāñcī according to the KV: Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala (outer; see n. 179), Tapovana (middle), Brahmaśāla (inner; all visualisations, see subsection 1.3.3). Cities as border sites are marked in grey, rivers / tīrtha—blue.

designed in orientation towards the geographical dimensions and the positions of the sites in Kanchi and the surrounding area.

The largest area enclosing Kāñci is called Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala, named after the king Tuṇḍīra, who is said to have once ruled this region (KV 1.11–32). The limits of this area are marked by four sites: Pūrvasindhu, the Eastern Ocean (Bay of Bengal) in the east; Dakṣiṇapinākinī (Southern Pennar, Then Pennai in Tamil) in the south; Śīlāhṛda (Kallar river, Kallaru in Tamil; a tributary of the Southern Pennar), in the west; and Svāmipuṣkariṇī (Svāmi Puṣkariṇī temple tank; at the Veṅkaṭeśvara Swāmi temple in Tirupati) in the north (see figure 5.1).¹⁷⁹ In keeping with the well thought-out concept that characterises Śākta Māhātmya, these four sites share a common feature: they are all bodies of water. As such, they are also part of the natural geographical landscape, the features of which often serve to delineate an area.

The name Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala is the Sanskrit equivalent of Tondaimandalam, the Tamil name of the historical region around Kanchi that was ruled by the Pallava kings (Mahalingam 1969, 2–4; Srinivasan 1979, 7). The spatial reach given by the KV for Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala seems to agree with that of Tondaimandalam. For this historical region, T. V. Mahalingam (1963, 2–3) lists the Bay of Bengal (east), the Pennar river (south), the range of the Eastern Ghats (west), and the Suvarṇamukhī river (north) as the regional borders. A comparison with the border sites of Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala shows close correspondences, with the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* opting for uniformity—a recurrent element throughout the text—and detailing four water bodies. The KV as well as T. V. Mahalingam mention the Bay of Bengal as the eastern limit and the Then Pennai river as the southern.¹⁸⁰ Moving to the west, there is agreement on the same area, with the Kallar river indicated by the Māhātmya originating near the Kalvarayan Hills, a range of the Eastern Ghats. The northern border is a similar case: the Suvarṇamukhī (Swarnamukhi) river mentioned by T. V. Mahalingam flows through the Tirupati hills, again pointing to the same area—Tirupati—as the KV. While similar dimensions for the region of Kāñci are given in the Śaiva *Kāñcimāhātmya* (KM(Ś)) and the

179 Pūrvasindhu / the Bay of Bengal, Dakṣiṇapinākinī / the Southern Pennar river, and Śīlāhṛda / the Kallar river are larger bodies of water. Their markers in figure 5.1 are therefore placed somewhere within their course (river) or areal (ocean). Furthermore, I wish to thank R. Satyanarayanan for his help in identifying the site Śīlāhṛda.

180 Inferred from the indicated direction south of Kanchi, the Pennar river mentioned by T. V. Mahalingam must be the Then Pennai / Southern Pennar river flowing through Tamil Nadu—the same one referred to by the Māhātmya—and not the Northern Pennar River flowing in Andhra Pradesh.

Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, there is no indication of an explicit orientation towards a historical space in these texts (cf. sections 4.2 and 6.2). Such a distinct geographical alignment is singular to the outline of Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala in the KV and echoes the relevance of this regional demarcation in the perception of Kanchi (see chapter 7 and figure 7.1 for details).

Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala is further linked to the goddess Kāmākṣī and her myth in the KV, although not explicitly in the first chapter of the KV.¹⁸¹ An expression of this particular link may also be found on site: in the first *prākāra* (enclosure) of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple there is a shrine of Tuṇḍīra Mahārāja, king Tuṇḍīra, but I am not aware of a specific myth linked to him.

The other two *kṣetras* sketched out as surrounding Kāñcī are more clearly associated with a myth told in the *Māhātmya*. Situated within Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala lies the second most extended space, Tapovana (forest of asceticism). Its name refers to the origin myth of Ekāmranātha as narrated in the KV, in which Pārvatī performs ascetic practices in the forest at Kāñcī to attain Śiva's presence there.¹⁸² The sites marking the extent of Tapovana are all cities: Mahābalipura (Mamallapuram) in the east; Devākīpura (Devikapuram) in the south; Viriñcīpura (Virinchipuram) in the west; and Nāgahalapura (Nagalapuram) in the north (KV 1.33–41; see figure 5.1). In accordance with the Śaiva notion indicated by the name Tapovana and the reference to Ekāmranātha's myth, the myths about the four sites places all refer to manifestations of Śiva there.¹⁸³ A deliberate similarity of these sites could therefore be their common affiliation to Śiva.

Within Tapovana lies Brahmaśālā, the smallest of the three enclosing spaces. Its name alludes to the myth of Varadarāja's origin, in which Brahmā

181 The connection of Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala with Kāmākṣī is not explicit in the first chapter of the KV. It can initially only be deduced from the association of the other two spaces surrounding Kāñcī with Ekāmranātha and Varadarāja. Yet, it is later on confirmed by the concluding *phalaśruti* section of the Śākta part, in which Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala and its delimiting sites are explicitly mentioned to indicate Kāmākṣī's location (KV 13.70–71).

182 Including a list of its border sites, Tapovana is mentioned in the concluding *phalaśruti* section of the Śaiva part to spatially contextualise Ekāmranātha (KV 9.50c–52b). This link of Tapovana with Ekāmranātha mirrors the characterisation of the space given in the first chapter of the KV and is another example of the consistent spatial concept of the text.

183 An attribution of the stories to particular (Śaiva) temples at these locations is beyond the aims of this study. A closer look into the relevant local Sthalamāhātmyas would possibly shed light on this matter.

builds a sacrificial hall for his sacrifice to Viṣṇu in Kāñcī.¹⁸⁴ The limits of this space are marked by the following cities: Triveṇiṣaṅganagarī (Thirumukkudal), Vyāghravana (Thirupulivanam), Kṣīrābdhinagarī (Thiruparkadal), and Nandiḡaṅgāpurī (Thakkolam) are named to mark the limits of this space (KV 1.42–50b; see figure 5.1).¹⁸⁵ Two places are associated with Śiva and two with Viṣṇu in the short stories about their myths. Even from the short accounts, the Vaiṣṇava sites can be identified with certain temples in the region of Kanchi. In Thirumukkudal there is the Appaṅ Veṅkaēca Perumāl and in Thiruparkadal there is the Raṅkanāta Svāmi temple, where the image in the sanctum sanctorum is in reclining form, just like the Māhātmya describes Viṣṇu there. Both temples are located on the banks of the Palar, which—as Sarasvatī’s aquatic form, the Vegavatī (Vegavathi / Palar river)—is a crucial element in the myth of Varadarāja. This detail reflects how the locations and the myths attached to the border sites are carefully considered to create a compelling concept.¹⁸⁶

Kāñcī as City

Similarly, the space of Kāñcī, Kāñcīkṣetra, is carefully designed. Its name corresponds to the designation used in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* to label Kāñcī’s territory and the non-specific name given to Kāñcī’s area in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (cf. sections 4.2 and 6.2). Despite the conformity regarding the city’s name, the texts differ considerably in their understanding of both the space’s extent and character. In the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, the area

184 Referring to the same myth, the Vaiṣṇava Māhātmya also defines the dimensions of Brahmā’s hall (called *yajñasālā* in that text) but of different size (cf. section 6.3).

185 The identification of the first three sites is based on correspondences in name; that of Nandiḡaṅgāpurī with Thakkolam is derived from the myth about the place about Śiva’s mount Nandī.

186 Even more so, the KV conceives uniform spaces with sides of equal length. For each of the three spaces in the regional localisation of Kāñcī, the distance from one border site to the next in the sequence is said to be the same. For example, the sites delimiting the space Tapovana are each detailed to be at a distance of five *yojanas* to the preceding one (KV 1.34c–40). When visualised on a map, the dimensions of each space are not as symmetrical as indicated by the text (see figure 5.1). However, the units indicating the distance between the locations are temporal length units, so the travel time from one location to the next could actually been the same (for details, see subsection 1.3.3). Therefore, the same distances may not only have been chosen for the sake of uniformity but may have actually corresponded to the conditions of travel.

limited by the border places of Kāñcīkṣetra roughly encloses the historical city of Kanchi and only the city. The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* understands Kāñcī as a city—an existing city to be precise. The aspect of Kāñcī's evolution remains unmentioned in the text, no story about its creation is included. Rather, the idea of Kāñcī as a city seems to be taken for granted.

Continuing the movement from the periphery inwards, Kāñcīkṣetra lies within Brahmaśālā. Its extent is said to be marked by Durgā Pañcālikā in the east, Śiva Kanyakeśa in the south, Viṣṇu called Śvetavarṇa in the west, and Durgā Kṣetrāṅgī in the north (KV 1.50c–68b). These sites are again used to sketch the spaces within Kāñcī, which reflects a well thought-out spatial design of the Māhātmya (see section 5.3). While the localisation of any of the border sites of Kāñcīkṣetra has been so far unsuccessful,¹⁸⁷ it can nevertheless be assumed that Kāñcīkṣetra is meant to encompass approximately the extent of the historical city, considering the pronounced orientation towards the geo-spatial dimensions shown in the text. In fact, the dimensions of Kāñcī seem to largely correspond to the outline of the city as given on the *Map of Conjeevaram* by John Gould from 1816, one of the first old maps of Kanchi (Stein 2021, 240; see figure 2.3). Drawing this comparison is indeed well founded: it can be assumed that the conception of Kāñcī in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* refers to the city at the time of its composition and there are arguments speaking in favour of the origin of the text in the nineteenth century (see section 5.4 and pp. 85–89).

While the three enclosing spaces are outlined to locate Kāñcī geographically, Kāñcīkṣetra is the locale for the overarching Śākta myth of the KV. It is said to be first and foremost characterised by the presence of power ((*mahā*-)śakti) of the illusory nature (*mahāmāyā*) that is linked to the Goddess principle (Devī). This power is primarily manifest as the goddess Kāmākṣī, but also as Varadarāja and Ekāmrānātha. A narrative explains Ekāmrānātha's and Varadarāja's emergence from the imperceptible forms of Śiva and Viṣṇu, which have emanated earlier from the goddess (see subsection 3.3.2). Ekāmrānātha and Varadarāja are thus identified with Kāmākṣī and the male gods are located in relation to the goddess's own and original form (KV 1.94–125b).

In the text-internal understanding, the location of the goddess's abode (Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ) seems too obvious to specify it beyond locating her *in*

¹⁸⁷ Śvetavarṇa can probably be identified with a former Viṣṇu shrine near Paruti Kuḷam in the northwest of Kanchi, which is the location indicated by the text (KV 1.53cd). Thanks go to M. Ramesh for identifying this detail. The KM(V) also mentions a white-coloured Viṣṇu (Sudhākāra), but the details given in the Māhātmya are insufficient to identify this place (see subsection 6.4.1).

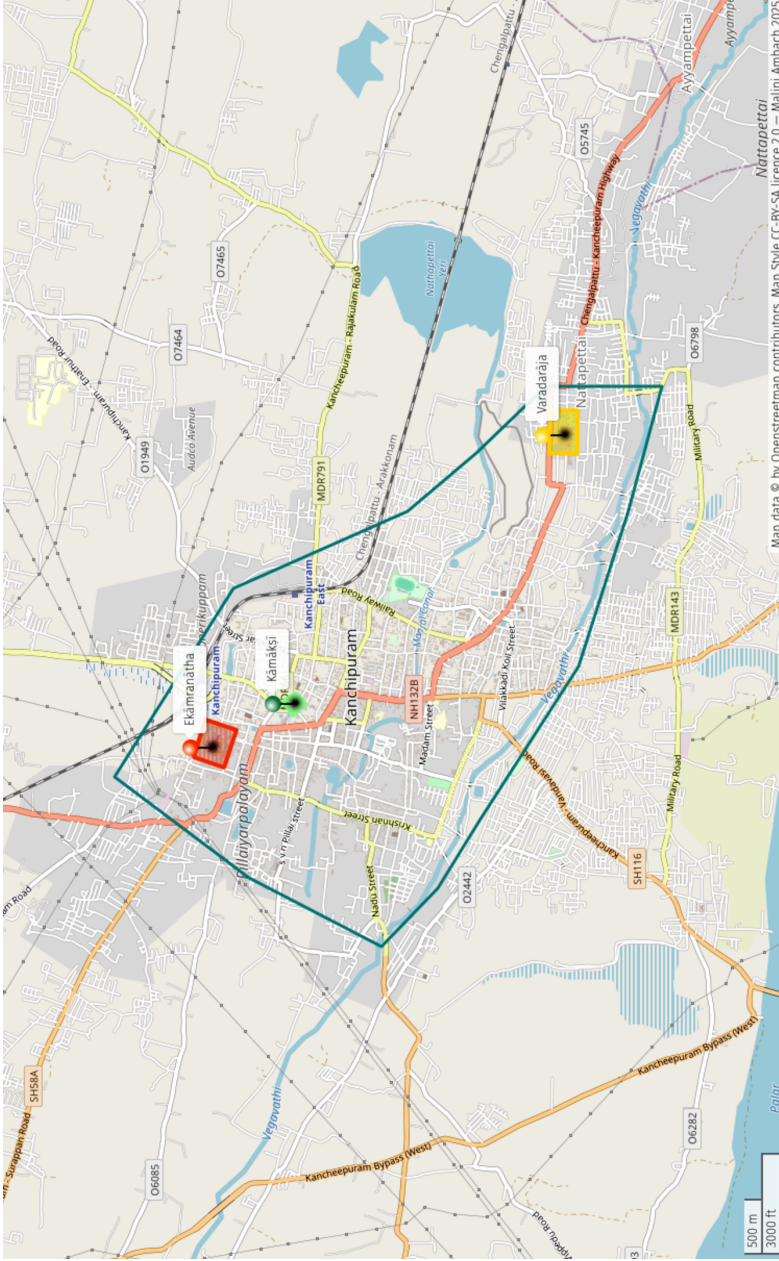


Fig. 5.2 Ekāmanātha, Kāmākṣī, and Varadarāja as spatial identifiers of Kāncī's area (estimate; see pp. 150–151) in the KV.

Kāñcīkṣetra (*kāñcīkṣetre* (KV 1.94–102)). Viṣṇu (Varatarāja Perumāl) is to the southeast of her abode and Śiva (Ēkāmparanātar) to her northwest, just as the deities' temples are positioned in Kanchi (see figure 5.2). Accordingly, Kāñcīkṣetra is conceived as the realm of all three deities (KV 1.57c–58c). This characterisation and the myth about Kāmākṣī, Varadarāja, and Ekāmranātha give a preview of the design of the space within Kāñcīkṣetra, where a separate area is set aside for each of the three deities (see section 5.3).

The above consideration of the three spaces outlined for the geographical contextualisation of Kāñcī shows how the relevance of location and character of the sacred sites—as a Vaiṣṇava, a Śaiva, a Śākta, or a *tīrtha*—seem to balance each other in the selection of places included in the Māhātmya. Furthermore, precise knowledge of the geographical spatiality becomes apparent and is a key component for the spatial outline of Kāñcī and the region presented in the KV.

5.3 Sacred Spaces and Places Within Kāñcī

Within Kāñcīkṣetra, the spatial segmentation that characterises the design of Kāñcī's sacred geography in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* continues. The geography-chapters (KV chs. 2, 6, and 10) outline three *kṣetras* that are styled as the territories of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī and are clearly based on the spatial positions of the three largest temples in the city. Harikṣetra covers the southeast where the Varatarāja Perumāl temple is located, Rudraśālā is to the west where the Ēkāmparanātar temple is found in the northwestern part, and Kāmakoṣṭha lies between the two in the central area where the Kāmākṣī Ammaṅ temple is situated. The spaces represent separate and evenly matched Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta domains in Kāñcī, with equal significance given to the three religious traditions. The different sizes of the spaces, though, do not seem to be of relevance.

Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha are positioned side by side and neatly divide the space of Kāñcī. With this layout, and in particular Kāmakoṣṭha, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is the only Māhātmya that explicitly assigns Devī a territory in Kāñcī. At the same time, a structural balance is maintained by also assigning Śiva and Viṣṇu their own areas in the space of the city. Within each of the three spaces within Kāñcī, there is again a centripetal movement and increasing fragmentation of space. Its depiction in the respective geography-chapter first outlines the outer boundaries of the deity's

realm in a clockwise sequence, then selected sacred sites are mapped, before the spatial focus turns to the immediate surroundings of the deity (the area of its temple) where the deity's myth of origin is primarily set.

The attempted equality is not only reflected in the spatial design but also in the structural layout down to individual phrases. The Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta parts are equally constructed, their geography-chapters include the same textual modules: a set of border sites, groups of different kinds of sacred places in similar numbers, a statement on the number of places, and a *phalaśruti* passage in similar wording.¹⁸⁸ The unified mode of presentation appears to be a carefully conceived account that favours an equal consideration of the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta sites and their traditions over a more individually adapted and lively design.

The text's schematic approach is also expressed in a consistent pattern for indicating the locations of the sacred sites mapped in the geography-chapters. Each place is located by a directional statement that indicates both direction and distance in reference to the site that is introduced immediately before in the text. For example, Viṣṇu as Vaikuṅṭha (Vaikuṅṭha Perumāḷ) is located twenty-one *aṃśas*¹⁸⁹ (parts) north of Viṣṇu called Dīpādhara (Viḷakkoḷi Perumāḷ), who again is said to be seven *aṃśas* north of the preceding site, that is Viṣṇu as Siṃha (Aḷakiya Ciṅka Perumāḷ; KV 2.22c–25b; see figure 5.3). There are only a few exceptions to this pattern, when the place reference is not to the last place mentioned, but to another, already presented, closer place.

The directional referencing pattern is a characteristic feature of the text and similar to the one found in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, while the *Kāmākṣivīlāsa* additionally specifies the distance to the reference site. As in the KM(Ś), the section about a sacred place usually begins by indicating its location. This framing indicates a retrospective perspective that is adopted in the text and understands the places as already existing. Such an approach conceptually refers to a stable and consistent sacred landscape,

188 The descriptions of Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā and Kāmakoṣṭha are each followed by a longer *phalaśruti* story illustrating the power of the respective space. These end the respective chapters. They are again very uniform in character as they each tell of a wicked twice-born from a place around India, who at death is rescued respectively by Viṣṇu's (Harikṣetra), Śiva's (Rudraśālā), or Devī's (Kāmakoṣṭha) troops from Yama's grip as he once did a good deed to a resident of the respective areas in Kāñcī. Then the respective deity explains why this person is taken to his/her abode despite the deplorable lifestyle he had led in his life. These stories serve to underline the outstanding power ascribed to the respective *kṣetra*.

189 On the length unit *aṃśa*, see n. 16.

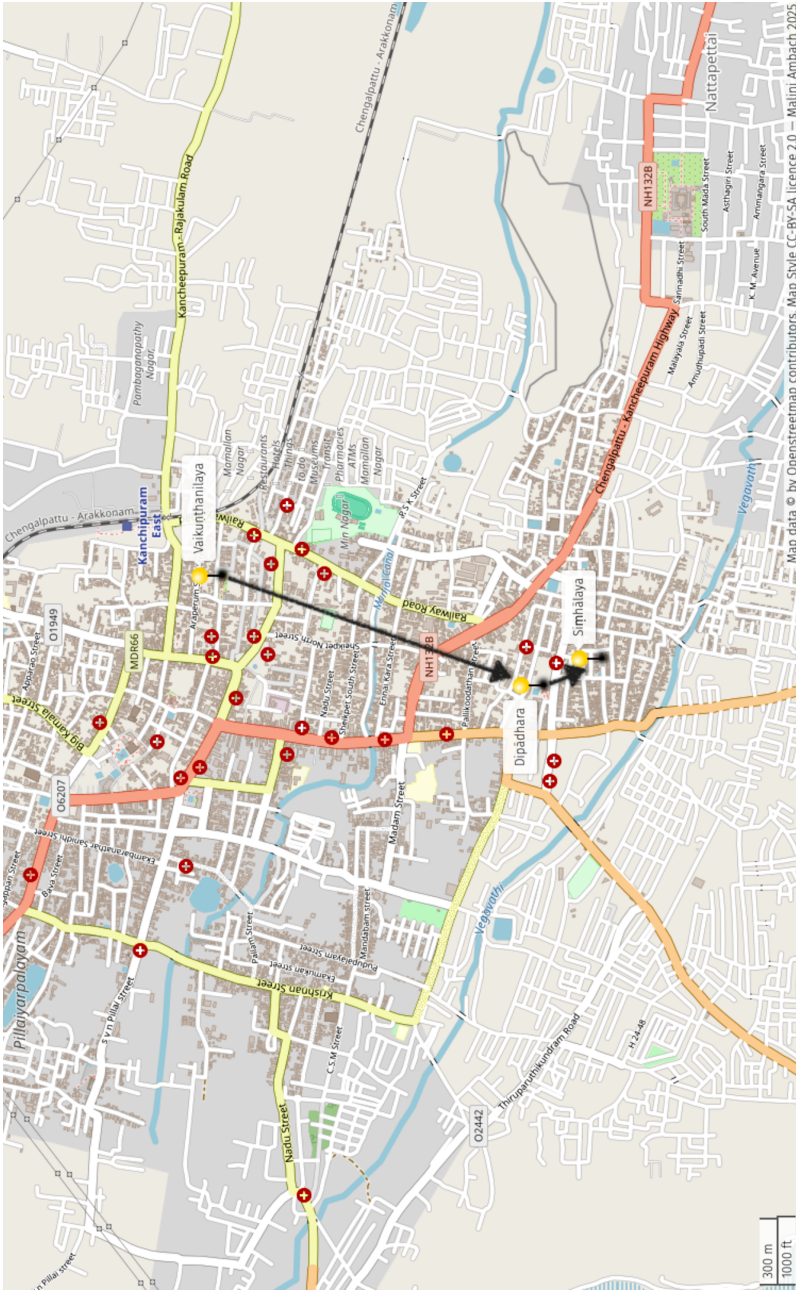


Fig. 5.3 Directional referencing pattern that locates the sacred sites in the KV, example.

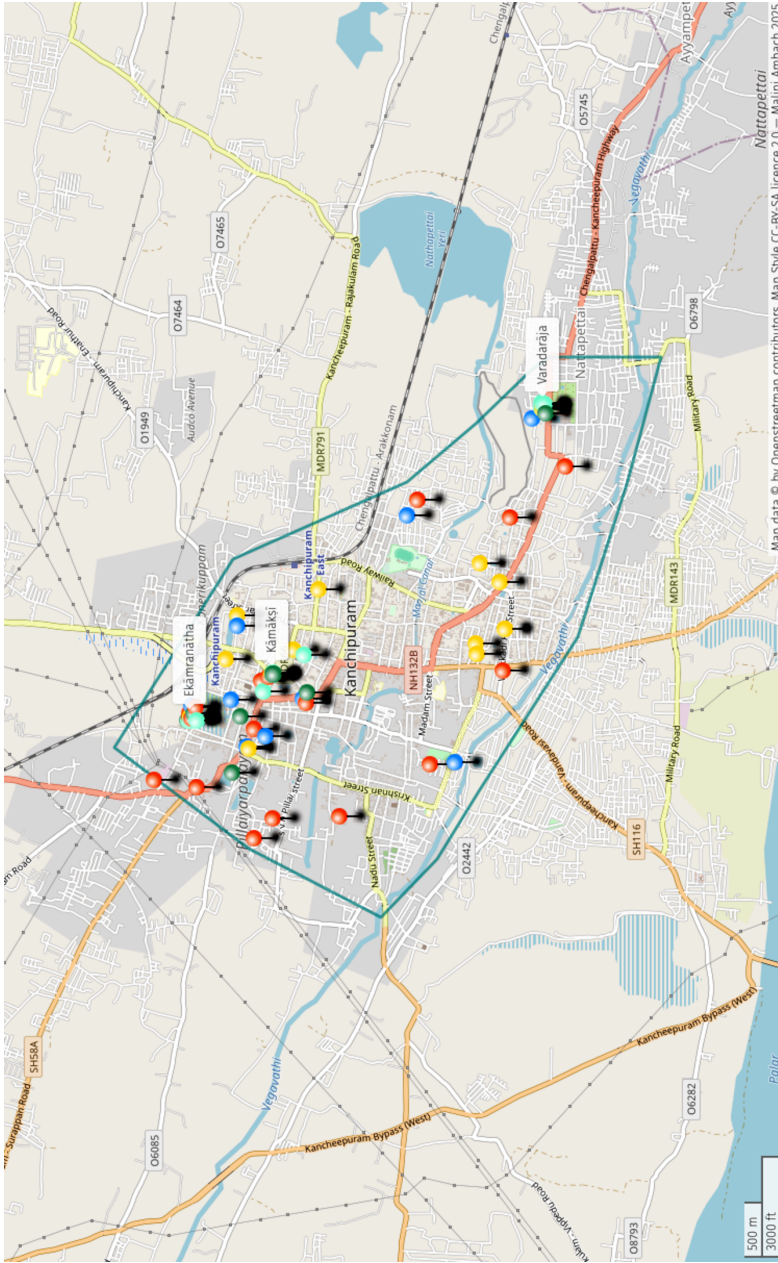


Fig. 5.4 Locations of the sacred places in Kāñcī (turquoise outline; estimate, see pp. 150–151) in the KV. Vaiṣṇava places are marked in yellow, Śaiva places—orange, Goddesses—green, *tīrthas*—blue, all other places in aqua.

which consists of all the places mentioned in the text. It further displays an orientation towards the spatiality of the historically grown cityscape and precise knowledge of the position of the historical sites. In the geography-chapters, the description of an individual site is very condensed, as a rule two half-verses are dedicated to a place. This allows for only a brief remark on the myth of the place or the deity residing there. The alluded stories refer to known narratives from the Purāṇic and epic literatures and are linked to a specific local site in the Māhātmya. In contrast, the myths of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī, as well as the description of the characteristic features of the deities' sites, and the sacred water bodies linked to them are more detailed (KV chs. 3–5, 7–9, 11–13).

With its interpretative arrangement, the KV catalogues selected sacred sites existing in Kanchi (see figure 5.4).¹⁹⁰ In the geography-chapters, sites of the same deity—Viṣṇu, Śiva, Devī—, sacred water bodies, and places called *mudrās* (see below) within one space are given in groups. Each group comprises approximately the same number of places. Thus, there is a balance in terms of religious affiliation or characteristic of a site within the spaces Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha.¹⁹¹ The only noteworthy difference is a slight numerical emphasis on the Vaiṣṇava sites in Harikṣetra, on the *śivaliṅgas* in Rudraśālā, and on the goddesses in Kāmakoṣṭha. Apart from these, individual places of Skanda and Gaṇeśa are mentioned. All sacred places are framed in terms of spatial belonging to one of the three realms. The individual place seems to be chosen both because of its location within one of the spaces and the religious affiliation of its residing deity or its classification as *tīrtha* or *mudrā*.

A number of sites belong to a specific group and are explicitly designated as *mudrās*. In its primary sense, the term *mudrā* means seal (MW, s.v. *mudrā*). Derived from this, it can also mean sign or mark and in this sense *mudrā* is used in the KV. The group of *mudrās* subsumes deities, physical elements, or conceptual entities that are characteristic of the myth or place of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī, and/or are part of the religious practice at their temples. Their location in the immediate vicinity of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī, that is, within the precincts of their temples, is the common feature of the *mudrās*. Among others, they include the Tattvasopāna (Tattvasopāna), the staircase leading up to the first enclosure (*prākāra*) within the central building at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple;

190 See the appendix for the sites mentioned in the *Kāmākṣivilāsa*.

191 The four border sites of each space are not part of this arrangement and evidently chosen as limiting markers because of their geo-spatial position.

the *śivaliṅga* Dhavaḷaikāmranāyaka (Veḷḷakkampar) in the first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmparanātar temple; and the Santānastambha (Santanastambha), a silver pillar and an object of worship situated in the inner *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple. Conceptually, the *mudrās* seem to be understood as elementary characteristics of the respective territories of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī.

In this ascribed quality, the *mudrās* resemble the elements that are said to mark Kāñcikṣetra. Three of these are mentioned in the description of the *kṣetra* in the KV: the cave (*bila*), identified on site as the space below the sanctum sanctorum at the Kāmākṣi Ammaṅ temple, the (single mango) tree ([Ekāmra-]vṛkṣa), the site-tree and an important object of worship at the Ēkāmparanātar temple, and the [Puṇyakoṭi-]vimāna, represented on site as the tower superstructure above the sanctum sanctorum at the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple.¹⁹²

The geography-chapters reflect the general centripetal spatial movement that characterises the design of the sacred geography in the KV. This arrangement eventually closes in on the abodes of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī. Furthermore, considering the order of the descriptions of the three spaces within Kāñcī (first Viṣṇu's, then Śiva's, and finally Devī's) and assuming that the most important subject in a Māhātmya is described at the end (Ramesh 2020, 7, 118), an ultimate focus on Kāmākṣī may emerge: the Śakta part and with it the geography-chapter describing Kāmākṣī's territory come last (KV chs. 10–13).

5.3.1 Viṣṇu in the East

The realm of Varadarāja is called Harikṣetra (the area of Hari (Viṣṇu)). It is comprehensively described in the first chapter of the Māhātmya's Vaiṣṇava part (KV ch. 2). In this space, the myths that revolve around Varadarāja unfold (KV chs. 3–5). Harikṣetra is variously referred to by this particular name to locate events taking place within the mythological stories of the Vaiṣṇava part. It is further glorified in a specific *phalaśruti* section as Viṣṇu's territory in Kāñcī (KV 5.38–53).

In line with the schematic approach of the text, four locations are given as markers of the boundaries of Harikṣetra (KV 2.3–5a). These are Śiva Paurandareśa (Satyanātasvāmi), the goddess Pāñcālīnī (identification uncertain),

192 [Mārkaṇḍeya tells:] *bilavṛkṣavimānāñkaiḥ kṣetraṃ tajasam ucyate* || KV 1.59cd.

Viṣṇu at Siṃhālaya (Aḷakiya Ciñka Perumāḷ), and the goddess Kṣetrāṅgikā (identification uncertain). The space in-between the four sites covers the (south-)eastern part of Kanchi where the temple of Varadarāja is also found (see figure 5.5). The location of Varadarāja's abode and thus the temple is the essential factor for the positioning of Harikṣetra. It is not located in the spatial centre of the space but is perceived as the conceptual focal point.

After the border sites are defined, the KV maps twenty-six sacred places in Harikṣetra (KV 2.9–44; see figure 5.5). The four sites designated as border sites (see above) are listed again in this description and are among the twenty-six. In addition, two of the border sites, Pāñcālīnī and Kṣetrāṅgikā, of Harikṣetra are also two of the border places of Kāñcīkṣetra, showing how consciously the three spaces in Kāñcīkṣetra are fitted into the latter.

At the end of the listing, the Māhātmya itself specifies how many and which kind of sacred places it describes in Harikṣetra (KV 2.43–44):

In this sequence there abide in Harikṣetra one Gaṇeśa and likewise one Skanda, four Durgās (goddesses), three Śivas, eight Viṣṇus, five *mudrās*, and four *tīrthas* respectively to this day on Viṣṇu's command, in this ground. (KV 2.43–44)¹⁹³

In exactly this order the KV presents the sacred places, first some individual ones, then in groups of goddesses, *śivaliṅgas*, and so on. There is a slight emphasis on the sites of Viṣṇu in Harikṣetra, of which altogether eight are named. This is a subtle reflection of the association of Harikṣetra with Viṣṇu.

Places of the Goddess as mentioned in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* have proved difficult to identify with sites in Kanchi. This does not only apply to the sites in Harikṣetra, but generally to sites of Devī mentioned in the Māhātmya. The contemporary temples seem to be consistently known under their Tamil(-ised) names, which means that the names from the Māhātmya offer less orientation. It is noteworthy that the differences between the names mentioned in the Māhātmyas and the contemporary names occur in particular with places of the Goddess and only very rarely with the Śaiva or the Vaiṣṇava sites. I attribute this to the fact that goddesses tend to be much more connected to the local, non-Sanskrit, non-Brahminical traditions to which many originally belonged. Accordingly, their Sanskrit names are less

193 [Mārkaṇḍeya narrates to king Suratha:] *evaṃ kramād dharikṣetra eko vighneśvaras tathā | skandas tatra caturdurgās trayo rudrā janārdanāḥ || KV 2.43 aṣṭau mudrās tu tatpañca catustīrthāny anukramāt | adyāpi śāsanād viṣṇor var-tante taddharātale || KV 2.44.*

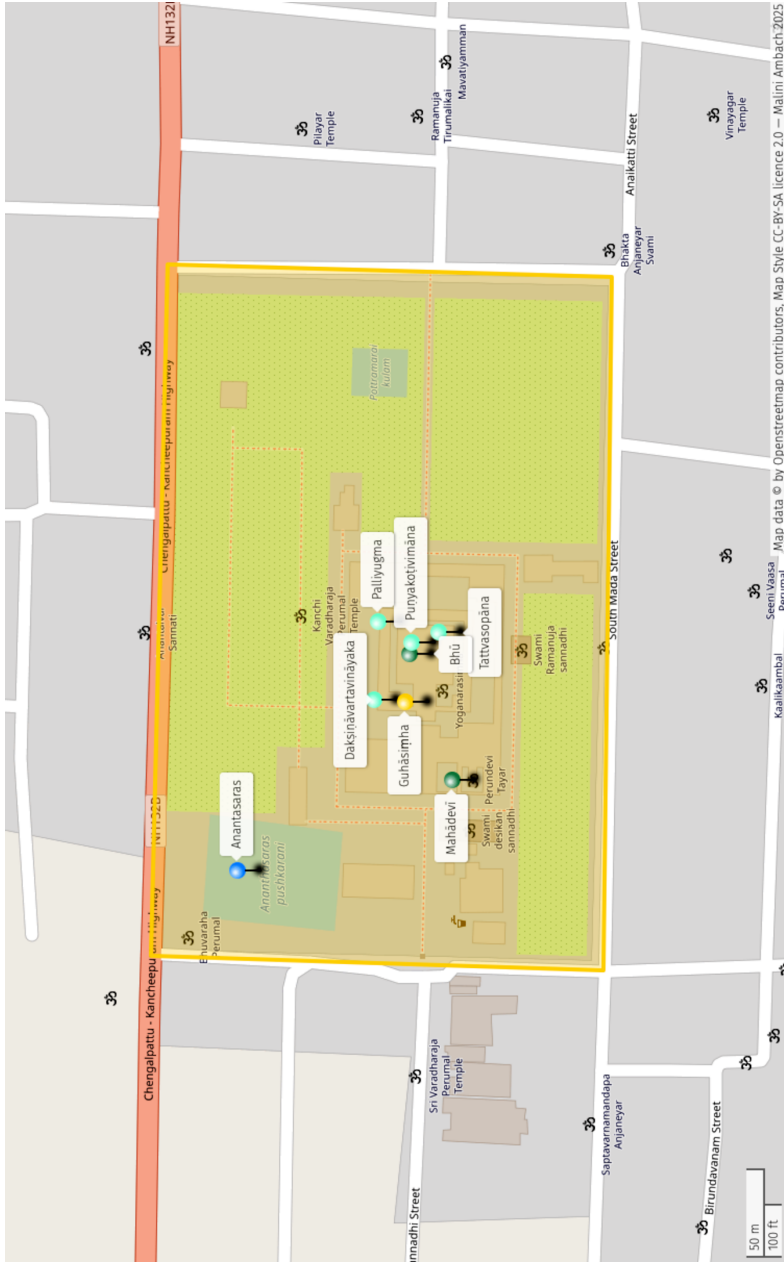


Fig. 5.6 Sacred places within the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple (yellow) as mapped in the KV. Viṣṇus are marked in yellow, Goddesses—green, *tīrthas*—blue, places of all other deities and *mudrās* in aqua.

Map data © by Openstreetmap contributors, Map Style CC-BY-SA licence 2.0 – Malini Ambach 2025

common.¹⁹⁴ Besides, Kanchi's cityscape is rather densely dotted with Devī shrines. They are often located only tens or hundreds metres away from each other. On such a micro-scale, the location information of a place of the Goddess from the KV is too general. It is therefore often not possible to clearly identify a place from the text with a particular temple of the Goddess. Yet, since the KV is the only text that mentions more than just a few places of the Goddess, these call for more detailed exploration elsewhere that also includes a comparison of their condensed myths of origin from the KV with narratives from other sources, in particular oral myths narrated in the temples of Kanchi.

With the exception of those of the Goddess, almost all of the other sites mentioned in the description of Viṣṇu's realm in Kāñcī can be identified with historical sites corresponding to locations indicated by the text. The design of the sacred geography of Harikṣetra thus shows a close correspondence to the religious landscape in Kanchi's (south-)eastern part. Yet, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* only catalogues selected sites in order to maintain a balance between the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta traditions.

Varadarāja is not included in the list of sacred sites in Harikṣetra. His presence in Kanchi has previously been mentioned in the introductory chapter of the Māhātmya, where he is located in Kāñcī's southeast (see pp. 150–151). Nonetheless, Varadarāja forms the implicit focal point of the area. Several other sacred sites in Harikṣetra are located in his immediate vicinity, that is, within the area corresponding to the complex of the Varatarāja Perumāl temple. This sub-area is thus the best mapped part of Varadarāja's territory in the KV (see figure 5.6¹⁹⁵). It illustrates the prominence of Varadarāja in the spatial design. Primarily the *mudrās*, the characteristic elements connected with Varadarāja, are situated at Varadarāja's abode, the hill Hastiśaila (Hastigiri), which is identified with the central two-storey building at the Varatarāja Perumāl temple that houses the sanctum sanctorum on its first floor. These are: Varadarāja's two consorts Bhū (Bhū; no separate shrine, as festival image in the sanctum sanctorum) and Mahādevī (Tāyār; third enclosure); the Palliyugma (Taṅkapalli, a pair of lizards; on the ceiling at the northeastern corner of the first *prākāra*); the Tattvasopāna (Tattvasopāna; the staircase leading up to the first floor of Hastigiri); and the Puṇyakoṭivimāna (Puṇyakoṭivimāna; the tower superstructure above the sanctum

194 On the type of local goddesses, see Flood 1997, 193–196.

195 The identification of the sites found within the Varatarāja Perumāl temple is based on a map by K. V. Raman (1975, fig. 39) and explanations by Ute Hüsken.

sanctorum; KV 2.26c–31b).¹⁹⁶ Of these, the pair of lizards is dealt with in more detail later in the KV (3.29–45b) and their origin is told as example of the redemptive powers of Harikṣetra.

In addition to the *mudrās* named above, Gaṇeśa called Dakṣiṇāvartavināyaka (Valampuri Vināyakar; second *prākāra*), Guhāsiṃha (Yōka Naracimma Perumāl; ground floor of Hastigiri), and the *tīrtha* Anantasaras (Anantacaras; fourth *prākāra*) are also situated within the compound of the Varatarāja Perumāl temple.¹⁹⁷ The condensed summaries about the origins of all these sites emphasize the closeness to Varadarāja by referring to the main myth of the Vaiṣṇava part. For example, Dakṣiṇāvartavināyaka is said to have been worshipped by Brahmā for an undisturbed completion of his horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*; KV 2.9–10b). This episode clearly refers to the myth of Varadarāja’s origin, in which Brahmā carries out an *aśvamedha* to see Viṣṇu in Kāñcī (KV chs. 3–4).

Just as carefully as the KV describes the spatial details of Harikṣetra, it also highlights its nature as Viṣṇu’s area. Among other attributive names, the space is designated as *bhūlokavaikuṅṭha* (Vaikuṅṭha on earth). Those beings living there are said to be inhabitants of Viṣṇu’s heavenly abode Vaikuṅṭha itself and attain Viṣṇu world at the end of life (KV 2.45–49b). Designating a place of Viṣṇu as Vaikuṅṭha on earth is not a unique occurrence: in the Tamil Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, extraordinary places of Viṣṇu and especially the Araṅkanāta Cuvāmi temple in Srirangam are considered as *bhūlokavaikuṅṭha* to stress their unique standing in resemblance to Viṣṇu’s own heavenly abode (Branfoot 2022a, 267). The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* does not connect this designation to a specific place of Viṣṇu in Kāñcī—not even to Varadarāja—but to Harikṣetra as a whole. The notion of this entire area as sacred is thus emphasised.¹⁹⁸ References to the conception of Harikṣetra

196 The pair of lizards attracts many visitors and is actively promoted. Interestingly, the signboards set up in the Varatarāja Perumāl temple to inform about the story of the lizards retell the narrative of the KV and not the KM(V) as might have been expected of a Vaiṣṇava temple. For a detailed study of the Taṅkapalli, see Hüsken 2022. The Tattvasopāna staircase leading up to the first enclosure where the sanctum sanctorum is has twenty-five steps, as many as there are *tattvas* (principles of reality) according to the Sāṅkhya philosophy.

197 Besides, the Māhātmya also locates Kumāra (Skanda; KV 2.10c–11b) within the precincts. According to Ute Hüsken (pers. comm., February 2021), a local oral tradition remembers a shrine for Skanda at the Varatarāja Perumāl temple. The shrine is still there but the image of the deity has been shifted to a separate temple in the west of Kanchi.

198 The Vaiṣṇava nature attributed to the (south-)eastern part of Kāñcī is further illustrated by an extended *phalaśruti* narrative (KV 2.49c–73).

as Vaiṣṇava are also found in the remaining chapters of the Māhātmya's Vaiṣṇava part. Therein, Harikṣetra is used as the fixed designation for the area covering Kāñcī's (south-)east.

The geography-chapter of the Māhātmya's Vaiṣṇava part is the main source for details on sacred sites in Harikṣetra. The further chapters of the Vaiṣṇava part (KV chs. 3–5) primarily cover Varadarāja's myth, interspersed with episodes on the origin of Hastiśaila and the Palliyugma (ch. 3). With the exception of Hastiśaila and the river Vegavatī (Vegavathi; ch. 5), they refer in passing to several of the sacred places already mentioned in the geography-chapter but do not introduce new ones. The Vegavatī appears as a central element in Varadarāja's myth and is furnished a separate myth of origin. It thus becomes clear that the description of Harikṣetra is also conceived with a view to setting the scene for the Vaiṣṇava narratives in the KV before they unfold right there in the further chapters.

5.3.2 Śiva in the West

In the same way that Viṣṇu's territory in Kāñcī is described in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, the area assigned to Śiva is also laid out and called Rudraśālā, the hall of Rudra (Śiva; KV ch. 6). The extent of the *kṣetra* is determined by the three Śivas Kāyādhirohaṇeśvara (Kāyārōkaṇeśvarar), Kanyakeśvara (identification uncertain), and Kailāsanāyaka (Kailācanātar) and Viṣṇu called Śvetavarna (identification uncertain; see n. 187; KV 6.3–5). Accordingly, the area within these limits covers Kāñcī's west and northwest, with Ekāmranātha (Ēkāmpanātar) as central site (see figure 5.7). Rudraśālā shares two border sites, namely Kanyakeśvara and Śvetavarna, with Kāñcikṣetra. It thus extends to an outer (western) boundary of the larger area, reflecting the careful spatial design observed in the KV.

After the border sites are defined, a selection of sacred sites is mapped (KV 6.9–43b). An overview of the places mentioned is given by the KV itself:

In this sequence there abide in Rudraśālā one Vighneśa and likewise one Skanda, four Durgās, eight Śambhus (Śivas) and three Viṣṇus, five *mudrās*, and four *tīrthas* to this day on Śambhu's command, in this ground Rudraśālā. (KV 6.41cd–43ab)¹⁹⁹

199 [Mārkaṇḍeya narrates to Suratha:] *evaṃ tadrudraśālāyām eko vighneśvaras tathā || KV 6.41cd skandas tatra caturdurgās śambhavo [']ṣṭau janārdanāḥ |*

In addition to the places named in this summary statement, the single mango tree (called *rasāla*) is also mentioned as a sacred place. A closer look further reveals that the border sites of Śiva's realm in Kāñcī—except Kanya-keśvara²⁰⁰—are counted among the places indicated in the listing. Reflecting the Śaiva affiliation of Rudraśālā, *śivaliṅgas* number most among the sacred sites mapped in this space (see figure 5.7). Twelve Śaiva sites are mentioned in Rudraśālā, which is almost half of the twenty-eight sites catalogued in total in the Śaiva geography-chapter.

As in the case of Hariḷṣetra, the section of Rudraśālā that is most precisely outlined concerns the immediate surroundings of the deity in focus of the area, which here is Ekāmranātha (see figure 5.8). Located within the precincts of the Ēkāmpanātar temple, there are first the five *mudrās* as characteristics of Ekāmranātha and his abode (KV 6.26c–31b).²⁰¹ These are Śiva Corekāmrapati (Kaḷḷakkampar), Mārkaṇḍeya (Mārkaṇṭhesvarar), Dhavaḷaikāmranāyaka (Veḷḷakkampar; all first *prākāra* of the Ēkāmpanātar temple), the goddess Gaṅgācailakā (Ēlavārkuḷali; second *prākāra*), and Virabhairava (identification uncertain). Furthermore, Gaṇeśa as Vikaṭacakravīnāyaka (Vikaṭacakkarā Vīnāyakar; fourth *prākāra*), Rasāla (Ekāmranāyḷkṣa, the single mango tree; in the courtyard opening from the third *prākāra*), Skanda called Ṣanmukha (Māvātī Kantar; second *prākāra*), the goddess Praḷayabandhinī (Pīraḷayakālī Ammaṅ; second *prākāra*), Śiva as Śmaśāneśvara (Kaccimāyāṇam; fourth *prākāra*), Viṣṇu called Candragrīva, (Nīlāttiṅkaḷtuṅṭa Perumāl; first *prākāra*), and Gaṅgātūrtha (Civakaṅkai-tūrttam; fourth *prākāra*) are also located within the Ēkāmpanātar temple complex. Among all sacred places located in Rudraśālā, the single mango tree occupies a special position. It is the characteristic associated with Ekāmranātha whose story of origin is separately elaborated in the KV (7.1–49b), with a *phalaśruti* story illustrating its powers. The significance of the tree is also reflected on site at the Ēkāmpanātar temple: it is not only the site-tree

trayo mudrās tu tatpaṅca catustūrthāny anukramāt || KV 6.42 *adyāpi śāsanāc chambhor vartate taddharātale* | 6.43ab.

- 200 Kanyakeśvara is mentioned as border site of Kāñcīṣetra and Rudraśālā, but both the description of Kāñcīṣetra (KV ch. 1) and the Śaiva geography-chapter (ch. 6) only determine its location without referring to its story of origin. As far as I can see, it is the only place in the passages on sacred geography in the KV for which no myth is presented. I have not yet been able to explain this.
- 201 For the identification of the sites found within the Ēkāmpanātar temple, I rely on a map by Kerstin Schier (2018, 17, fig. 1.2), a description in Seshadri (2003, 121–124), a map with legend from Boulanger (1992, 96–98), a hand-drawn plan of the temple's first enclosure by N. Subramaniam (unpublished), and my own notes taken during field-visits in January 2020 and March 2023.

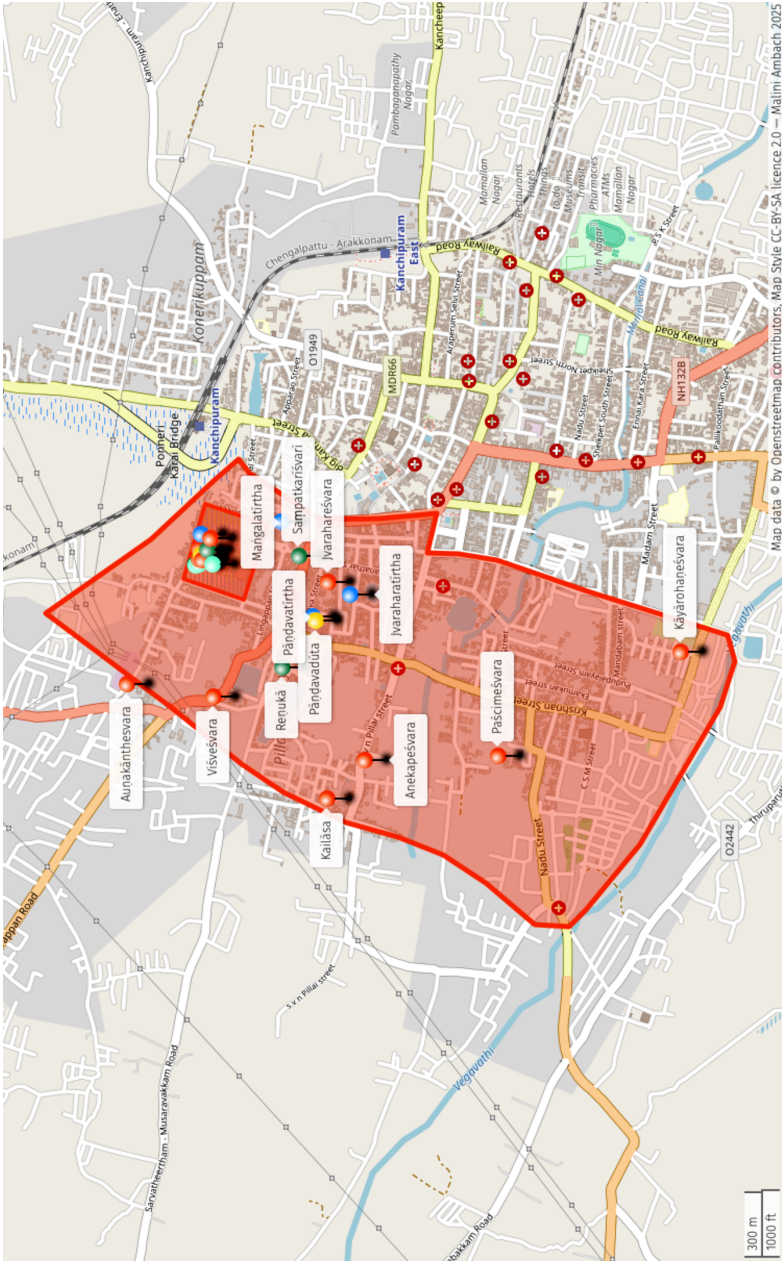


Fig. 5.7 Sacred places in Rudraśālā (visualised in orange) in the KV. Viṣṇus—yellow, śivaliṅgas—orange, Goddesses—green, *tīrthas*—blue; for the unlabelled pins within the Ekambaranātar temple complex (orange outline), see figure 5.8.

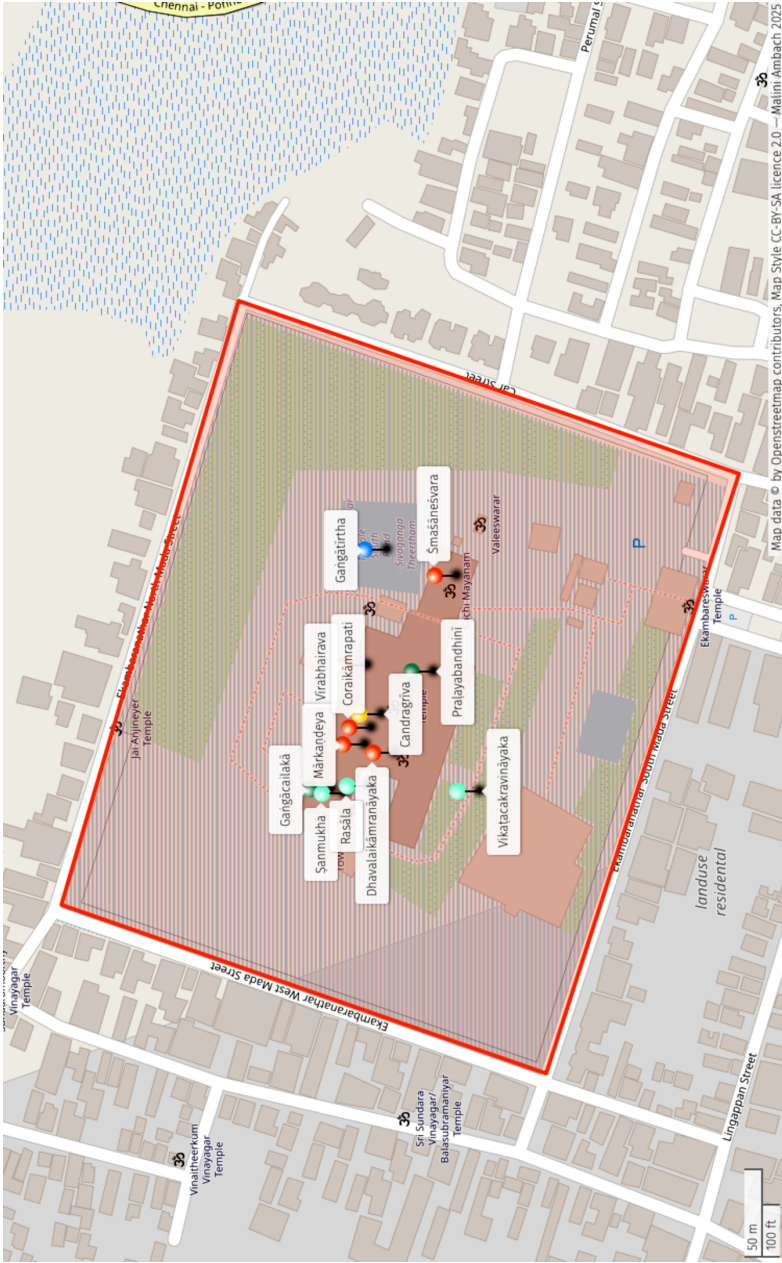


Fig. 5.8 Sacred places within the Ekāmparanātar temple (orange outline) as mapped in the KV. Viṣṇus are marked in yellow, śivalīngas—orange, Goddesses—green, tīrthas—blue, places of all other deities and mudrās in aqua.

(*sthalavṛkṣa*), but also the second most important place of worship after the *liṅga* located in the sanctum sanctorum (see pp. 101–106).

While Ekāmranātha himself is not mentioned in the geography-chapter of the text's Śaiva section, the spatial design of Rudraśālā places his site as the central point. Its position is known from the framing Śākta narrative set in Kāñcīkṣetra (KV ch. 1; see pp. 150–151) and Ekāmranātha is firmly situated in Rudraśālā in the further chapters of the Śaiva part (KV chs. 7–9). Analogous to Harikṣetra and Varadarāja's myth in the KV, Śiva's territory in Kāñcī is the backdrop for the Ekāmranātha myth in the text. The Śaiva character of this *kṣetra* and its ascribed powers are highlighted by comparing it with Śiva's heavenly abode, Kailāsa. In reference to the latter, Rudraśālā is designated as *bhūkailāsa*, Kailāsa on earth. Beings inhabiting this area are considered inhabitants of Kailāsa itself; additionally, living in Rudraśālā even for a moment is said to free one of all sins, grant vision of Śiva in human form and attainment of Śiva's world after death (KV 6.43c–47). Here again a space in Kāñcī is linked to a god's heavenly abode by referencing to its name the same way it is done by styling Harikṣetra as *bhūlokavaikuṅṭha*.

To illustrate the powers ascribed to Rudraśālā in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, there is a *phalaśruti* story about an evil brahmin whose faults are redeemed by offering a brahmin from Rudraśālā something to drink (KV 6.48–72). While explicit glorification of places described in a Māhātmya is a stylistic feature of this text genre, the length and scope of such passages vary across the texts. In the KV, *phalaśruti* statements and passages illustrating the beneficial powers of a site are rather prominent and extended. This approach suggests an intentional style of the text to promote Kanchi to worshippers and pilgrims. The KV as a Sanskrit text does not seem to have achieved a wider circulation, but the Tamil prose rendering, the *Kāmākṣī Līlā Pīrapāvam*, has. The latter was published in several editions during the twentieth century and is still available to a broader audience as part of collected volumes (Buchholz 2022, 33–34; see also pp. 85–89).

The details on the sacred sites in Rudraśālā are primarily found in the geography-chapter of the Śaiva part. Its last chapter (KV ch. 9) introduces the sacred water body that Sarvatīrtha (Carvatīrttam), which is not mentioned in the description of Rudraśālā before. It is located west of Ekāmranātha's abode and its story of origin evolves from a narrative motif found in Ekāmranātha's myth (KV chs. 7–8). The link indicated in the story is mirrored in the festival practice of the Ēkāmpanātar temple, which includes a concluding bath at the tank at the end of the temple's Mahotsava festival (Schier 2018, 55).

5.3.3 Devī at the Centre

With Hariḷḷsetra in the east and Rudraśālā in the west of Kāñcī, the space at the centre is the last to be discussed in the context of being assigned to a deity. Bordering the two aforementioned areas, this space is said to be Kāmākṣī's realm. It is called Kāmakoṣṭha (treasury of love) and considered as Śākta because of its link to the Goddess.²⁰² Its four border places are Viṣṇu at Siṃhālaya (Aḷakiya Ciṅka Perumāl), Kāyādhīrohaṇatīrtha (Tāyār Kuḷam), Śvetavarṇa (identification uncertain; see n. 187), and Durgā Kṣetrāṅgī (identification uncertain; KV 10.3–4b). These four sites are also specified as limiting markers of Kāñcīkṣetra as a whole as well as the areas of Viṣṇu and Śiva within Kāñcīkṣetra.²⁰³ Kāmakoṣṭha is thus positioned between Hariḷḷsetra and Rudraśālā and stretches across Kanchi's centre (see figure 5.9). By using the same border sites as the spaces adjacent to the east and west, Kāmakoṣṭha is clearly conceptualised to fit in between them. Or rather, the three spaces in Kāñcīkṣetra are clearly positioned so that they are adjacent but do not overlap (see figure 5.11).

In the geography-chapter of the Māhātmya's Śākta part, twenty-six sacred sites within Kāmakoṣṭha are mapped (KV 10.9–51; see figure 5.9). In the text, the selection of places is phrased as follows:

King, in this sequence there abide in Kāmakoṣṭha one Viḷḷhneśa and likewise one Skanda, six Durgās and four Viṣṇus, five Rudras (Śivas), and four *tīrthas* respectively to this day on Devī's command, in this ground Kāmakoṣṭha. (KV 10.50–51)²⁰⁴

The *mudrās* are omitted in the summarising statement, but five sites are introduced in this category. Three of them reference goddesses, making a total of eight goddesses located in Kāmakoṣṭha. The numerical emphasis on

202 On the designation Kāmakoṣṭha, see n. 84.

203 For Rudraśālā, though, the site in the adjacent corner is Kāyārohaṇeśvara (Kāyārōkaṇeśvarar) and not Kāyādhīrohaṇatīrtha (Tāyār Kuḷam). As can already be seen from the similarity in name, the *tīrtha* is linked to the Śaiva site; Tāyār Kuḷam is in fact the *tīrtha* of the Kāyārōkaṇeśvarar temple. Both places are situated close together, only around 180 metres away. The small difference does not affect the overall concept of the KV, both Rudraśālā and Kāmakoṣṭha are clearly designed to have their common corner near these locations.

204 [Mārkaṇḍeya narrates to king Suratha:] *evaṃ kramāt kāmakoṣṭhe eko viḷḷhneśvaras tathā | skandas tatra tu ṣaḍdurgā caturviṣṇus ca bhūpate || KV 10.50 pañcarudrās ca vartante catustīrthāny anukramāt | adyāpi śāsanād devyāḷ kāmakoṣṭhatale śubhe || KV 10.51.*

goddesses reflects the idea of Kāmakoṣṭha as a space characterised by the presence of Devī.

Within the precincts of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple are the five *mudrās* that are characteristics of Kāmākṣī's abode and her myth (see figure 5.10).²⁰⁵ These are Mahāgaurī Kāmākṣī (Tapaskāmākṣī; in the Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa²⁰⁶), Śivā Annapūrṇeśvarī (Annapoorna), Śāstā (Dharmaśāstā (Ayyappaṇ); both inner *prākāra*), Mahālakṣmī Añjanacchāyakāmākṣī (Saundaryalakṣmī; Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa), and the Santānastambha (Santānastambha; inner *prākāra*; KV 10.29–35b). The silver Santānastambha pillar is the only *mudrā* in Kāmakoṣṭha that is given its separate *phalaśruti* phrase alongside the summarising story of its origin (KV 10.35–38b). A particular significance is thus given to this object of worship.

Not mentioned in the geography-chapter but also located within the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple is Viṣṇu called Bhūtabandhaka (Pūtanikraha Perumāl; outer *prākāra*). His story of origin is essentially the myth about Pañcatīrtha (Pañcakaṅkaiṭṭṛttam; outer *prākāra*; KV 13.1–58; see n. 167 for a summary). While Pañcatīrtha is one of the *tīrthas* introduced in the description of Kāmakoṣṭha, it is also the sacred water body that is highlighted in Kāmakoṣṭha—analogue to the Vegavatī in the Vaiṣṇava and Sarvatīrtha in the Śaiva part. Unlike the latter two *tīrthas* and their connection to Varadarāja and Ekāmranātha respectively, Pañcatīrtha is not only linked by myth to the central deity of the area in which it is located but is also spatially close to Kāmākṣī. Apart from the five *mudrās*, it is the only site mentioned in the description of Kāmakoṣṭha that is also located in Kāmākṣī's vicinity.

The immediate surroundings of Kāmākṣī are thus not as densely dotted with sites as those of Varadarāja and Ekāmranātha. The major difference is in the deities Skanda / Murukaṇ and Gaṇeśa / Vināyakar. In the case of Harikṣetra and Rudraśālā, the places of the deities mentioned in the text are located within the compounds of the Varatarāja Perumāl and Ēkāmparanātar temples. For Kāmakoṣṭha, though, the Gaṇeśas and Skandas located in

205 My knowledge on the locations of the sacred sites within the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple is based on a hand-drawn map (unpublished) by Ute Hüsken, with some notes taken during my field-visits in January 2020 and March 2023.

206 The innermost part with the sanctum sanctorum of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple is a 24-pillared hall called Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa. In addition to Kāmākṣī's main image, the *mūlamūrti*, it houses Kāmākṣī's attendant goddesses and the Śrīcakra *yantra*, a mystical diagram representing the transcendent form of Devī in the pan-Indian Śrīvidyā Śākta tradition (for details, see Ilkama 2023, 26–32). The Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa is enclosed by the inner *prākāra* of the temple, where there are shrines of many other deities. The hall and the enclosure together form the main building of the temple with an outer *prākāra* surrounding it.

the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple are not considered. Instead, Skanda Kumāra-koṣṭha (Kumarakōṭṭam) and Gaṇeśa Śaṅkupāṇi (Caṅkupāṇi Vināyakar; at Sangupani Vinayagar Koil Street) are named. Both sites are still found comparatively close by, outside the compound of the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple but within the Rājavīthis, the streets that frame the area around the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ, Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ, and Kumarakōṭṭam temples (see figures 5.9 and 2.8). The Kumarakōṭṭam is one of the major temples in Kanchi, the largest temple dedicated to Skanda in the city, and conceptually linked to the Ēkāmparanātar and Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temples (see n. 50), while the Caṅkupāṇi Vināyakar is one of the more popular—and probably older—Vināyakar temples in the city.²⁰⁷ A particular ascribed relevance thus seems to be the reason why the two sites have been given preference over a Gaṇeśa and Skanda located in the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple.

In reference to Śrīpura, the heavenly abode of Devī, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* declares Kāmakoṣṭha to be Śrīpura on earth (*bhūmau tac chrīpuraṃ*). The inhabitants of this part of Kāñcī are said to live in Śrīpura itself; by the power of the area one is released from all sins and granted vision of the goddess in human form and entry into Devī's world after death (KV 10.52–56b). This equation is also intended to underline the extraordinary power of this space, for there cannot be a more desirable place than that in which the Goddess herself resides. The Śākta affiliation of Kāmakoṣṭha is further illustrated in a *phalaśruti* story (KV 10.56c–79) and repeatedly alluded to in the other chapters of the Māhātmya's Śākta part.

Similar to Ekāmranātha and Varadarāja, Kāmākṣī herself is not mentioned in the chapter describing Kāmakoṣṭha but forms the conceived centre. While the goddess is initially presented in the introductory chapter of the Māhātmya, her location is not specified beyond being *in Kāñcīkṣetra* (*kāñcīkṣetre*; KV 1.94–95). The myth of her origin—prefaced by a narrative about the *bila*, the cave, as characteristic of her abode—specifically unfolds in Kāmakoṣṭha and eventually describes her manifestation within that area (KV chs. 11–13). Uniquely for the text, the myth contains a passage referring to the construction and architecture of Kāmākṣī's dwelling place (KV 12.52–73). It narrates how the gods are commanded to build an abode (*āyatana*) for the goddess to manifest herself and reside in. It is located at the *bila* as representation of the highest ether in Kāmakoṣṭha, is situated next

207 The street leading to the Caṅkupāṇi Vināyakar temple is called Sangupani Vinayagar Koil Street. That the street is named after the temple at its end is not uncommon in Kanchi and Emma Stein notes that this pattern usually indicates an ancient site (2021, 60–61).

to a Jayastambha (pillar of victory), has the form of a *maṇḍapa*, a pillared hall, which is as large as the cave, has a door and is called Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa. Comparing this description with the layout of the Kāmākṣī Amman temple reflects a focus on the characteristic elements, particularly the Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa, the hall in the central building housing Kāmākṣī's main image. The architectural features listed in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* can be identified with: the cave commonly considered to be located below the Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa and not physically perceivable on site (see n. 85), the Jayastambha pillar found in the entry hall to the Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa, and the Gāyatrīmaṇḍapa itself, with the hall forming the sanctum sanctorum (see n. 206). All these elements are characteristic features of the temple as it stands today.²⁰⁸ Compared to the description of Ekāmranātha's abode found in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (see pp. 101–106), the text passage on Kāmākṣī's abode from the KV is less detailed. Nevertheless, it mentions specific particularities that *are* represented on site, thus embedding the mythical setting into a historical-physical one that can still be seen today.

As the above exploration shows, the same systematic structure is evident in all three geography-chapters of the KV. First, the boundaries of Viṣṇu's, Śiva's, or Devī's realm in Kāñcī are set out, followed by a main section with brief descriptions of the places mapped in that area, and finally there is a *phalaśruti* section praising the salvific powers of the territory. The summarising phrase reviewing the number of places mentioned in Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, or Kāmakoṣṭha reinforces the impression of a deliberate conception of the text.

Uniformity and balance unmistakably characterise the spatial design in the Śākta text and create a coherent overall concept. Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī are each given their own sphere in Kāñcī, with their abodes conceptually constructed as the centres. These three spaces are neatly arranged side by side without one being given more prominence than the others. Additionally, they seem to be deliberately constructed to fit into Kāñcīkṣetra, the space of the city, sharing their outer border places with the latter (see visualisation in figure 5.11). The dimensions of Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, or Kāmakoṣṭha result from the alignment to the urban structures of the historically grown city (see pp. 150–151).

208 According to David Shulman, the link of Kāmākṣī with the pillar that is an actively used object of worship is reminiscent of the Orissan cult of pillar deities. Similarly, several *liṅgas* at the Ēkāmparanātar temple and even an interpretation of Ekāmranātha's Tamil designation used in the *Tēvāram* poems of the Nāyaṇmār recall the idea of deities represented as pillars (Shulman 1979, 29, n. 34).

Moreover, Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta places, and also *tīrthas* are equally considered, reflecting a deliberate selection of the sites to be mapped in each space to keep an approximately balanced distribution and perspective on the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta traditions. The only differentiation is an increased attention to places in the close proximity to the main deity of a space. This element is part of the general centripetal movement of the spatial design in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, which begins with the outline of the larger region of Kāñcī, moves on to construct successively smaller spatial units, to ultimately zoom in on the abodes of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī as the central sites.

5.3.4 Sacred Water Bodies

The category of *tīrthas* has been largely excluded from the analysis of the KV so far though special attention is given to this type of sacred places in the text. Like all sites, sacred waters are integrated into the overall spatial concept in a pronounced structured and balanced way. For Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha, four *tīrthas* each are mentioned, and their location provided in the geography-chapters. Their description therein is about twice as extensive as that of the other sacred places but equally schematic in style. In addition to the positioning in relation to the place mentioned before and a condensed summary of its myth of origin, an attribution of the specific effective power of a *tīrtha* is given. For example, the description of Maṅgalatīrtha (Mañkaḷatīrttam; next to Mañkaḷeśvarar), one of the four *tīrthas* in Rudraśālā, reads as follows:

In its [Gaṅgā-tīrtha's] southeastern direction is the *tīrtha* named Maṅgala-[tīrtha]. Once it liberated the son of the earth (planet Mars) from being in the form of a fire. “Who takes a bath in it on a Tuesday may receive the reward [similar to that of] a bath in the [river] Bhāratī,” this best of boons Mars once gave to the *tīrtha*. (KV 6.34cd–36ab)²⁰⁹

209 [Mārkaṇḍeya narrates to king Suratha:] *tasya tīrthasya cāgneye tīrthaṃ maṅgaḷanāmakam* || KV 6.34cd *purā tad bhumiputrasya vahnirūpavimocakam | bhaumavāre tu yas snāyād bhāratīsnānaṃ phalam* || KV 6.35 *purā tīrthāya bhaumo [']pi dadau varam anuttamam* | KV 6.36ab.

The passage is exemplary of the episodes on *tīrthas* in the KV. The specific context is less relevant here than the recognisable structure and style.²¹⁰ Characteristic is the attribution of a power that is independent of the worship of a deity, as well as the naming of specific qualities. The benefits attributed to the place are presented as the boon of a mythological character who is said to have once benefited from the power of this place. While the story of origin of the *tīrtha* is not explicitly indicated, the *phalaśruti* element is emphasised. The latter is very specific about the efficacy of the *tīrtha*, mentioning both a specific point in time and the properties attributed to Maṅgalatīrtha, which are compared to those of the river Bhāratī (identification uncertain). The comparison of the powers of the local sacred water body in Kāñcī with those of a distant site reflects a general element of the sections on *tīrthas* in the KV. In the case of Maṅgalatīrtha, the statement aims to stress the importance of the local place by suggesting that one might as well take a bath at Maṅgalatīrtha on Tuesdays as make a pilgrimage to the distant Bhāratī.²¹¹ The reference implicitly classifies the place of reference as sacred, but strongly highlights the efficacy of the local *tīrtha*.

Besides the four *tīrthas* mentioned in each of the geography-chapters, each of the last chapters of the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta parts presents a narrative about a sacred water body. These sites are understood as significant characteristics of Varadarāja's, Ekāmranātha's, or Kāmākṣī's territory and feature in the myth of each main deity. The river Vegavatī (Vegavathi; KV ch. 5²¹²) is highlighted in the Vaiṣṇava part, Sarvatīrtha (Carvatīrttam; ch. 9) in the Śaiva part, and Pañcatīrtha (Pañcakankaitīrttam; ch. 13) in the Śākta part. The structural emphasis of these three *tīrthas* is an expression of the significance they are attributed in the text's versions of the myths of Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī. Accordingly, they are considered as sites of particular importance in Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha.

The myths about the tree *tīrthas* present individual story lines—in the case of the Vegavatī and Sarvatīrtha directly continuing from the myths

210 In different settings, Maṅgalatīrtha is also mentioned in the KM(V) (5.40c–42 and chs. 27 and 28) and the KM(Ś) (35.1–11).

211 With regard to sacred places in Maharashtra and in the Deccan, Anne Feldhaus (2003, especially ch. 5) extensively analyses the rhetorical means found, for example, in Māhātmyas to connect a local place with a distant one. Statements about *tīrthas* from the Māhātmyas on Kanchi can also be placed in the categories that Anne Feldhaus distinguishes in her study. For a more detailed look of such a hierarchising example from the KM(Ś), see the analysis on pp. 95–97.

212 Commonly, the *tīrthas* mentioned in Kanchi's Māhātmyas are stable water bodies—natural or constructed. However, the Vegavatī as a river is also classified as such in the KV.

about the origin of Varadarāja and Ekāmrānātha (KV chs. 3–4, 7–8)—that detail how the *tīrthas* came into being precisely in Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha, while the *phalaśruti* passages illustrate their powers (KV 5.1–37b, 9.1–46b, 13.1–65b). By underlining their belonging to and location in the territories of the three deities, the beneficial qualities of the Vegavatī, Sarvatīrtha, and Pañcatīrtha are intimately linked with those attributed to Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha. Overall, sacred water bodies are attributed greater significance compared to many of the other sacred sites in this Māhātmya and their power is individually specified and glorified.

5.4 Kāñcī and Kanchi

As the analysis above reveals, the spatial layout of Kāñcī in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is clearly derived from the spatiality of the urban and religious landscapes of Kanchi. It shows a high conformity with the actual geo-spatiality of the city and takes characteristic spatial properties into account. The outlines of Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha are oriented to the positions of the Varatarāja Perumāḷ, Ēkāmparanātar, and Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temples in Kanchi and seem to trace main roads of the city as boundaries (see figure 5.11). The Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple is in the southeast, the Ēkāmparanātar temple in the northwest, and the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ is towards the centre of Kanchi, though closer to the Ēkāmparanātar temple. Accordingly, the areas that are assigned to the three deities are constructed as separate Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta domains in Kāñcī. Moreover, among the Māhātmyas on Kanchi, the layout of Kāñcī displayed in the KV best reflects the polycentric structure of city's religious landscape.

The tripartite division within Kāñcī as well as the overall design of the areas in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* indicate a conscious concept. The allocation of different areas for the three deities is reminiscent of the division of the city in Shiva-, Vishnu-, and Jina-Kanchi (see figure 2.2). Shiva-Kanchi covers the western and northwestern part of the city with the Ēkāmparanātar, Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ, and Kumarakōṭṭam temples; Vishnu-Kanchi centres around the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple in the southeast; and Jina-Kanchi spreads in the suburb Tirupparuttikkunram in the southern part of the city, south of the river Vegavathi. These bynames for different parts of the city are in common use in the present-day Kanchi (see section 2.3). It is not entirely certain, though, when these designations were established. Indeed, there is an early

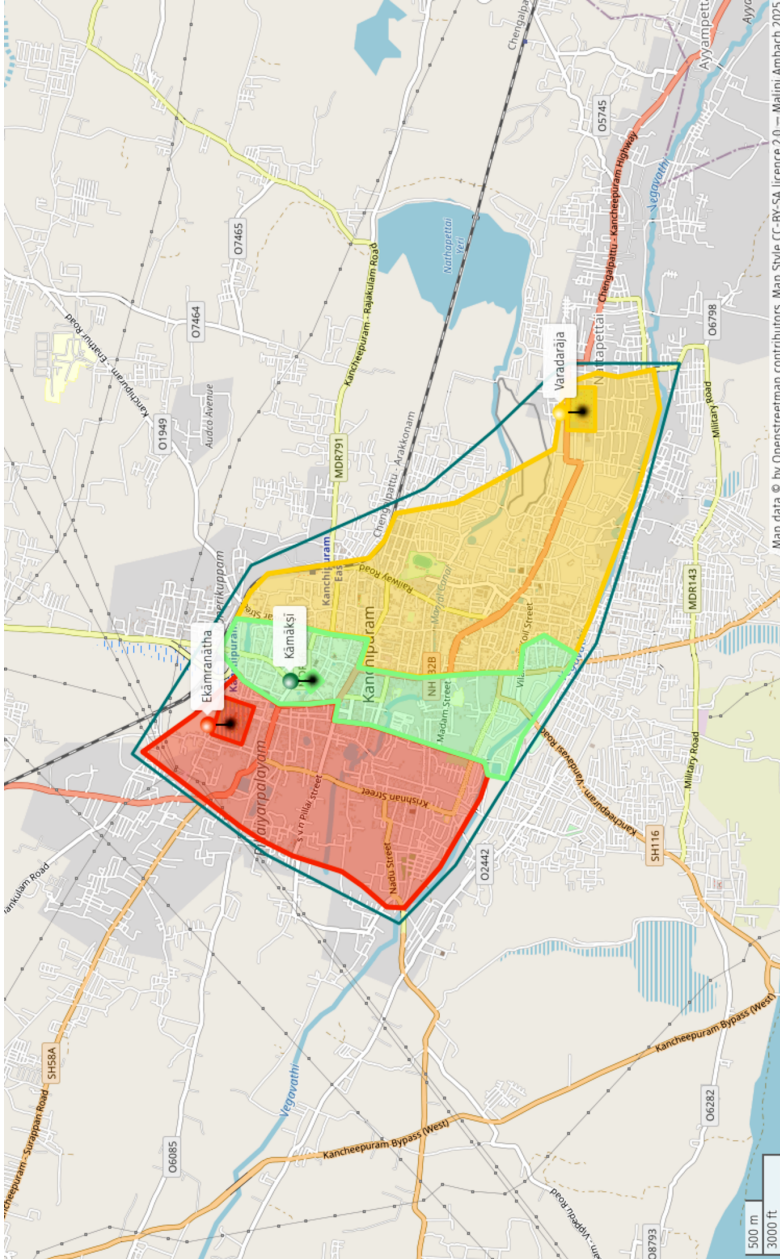


Fig. 5.11 Three spaces within Kāñci in the KV: Rudrasālā with Ekāmanātha (orange), Kāmākṣītha with Kāmākṣī (green), and Harikṣetra with Varadarāja (yellow), fitted within Kāñcīkṣetra (turquoise; estimate, see pp. 150–151).

inscription from the Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple dating to 1514 which states that the Vijayanagara King Krishnadevaraya mediated a dispute between the Ēkāmparanātar and Varatarāja Perumāḷ temple officials regarding the routes of their respective temple chariots during processions through the city by settling the processional routes (Raman 1975, 3; Srinivasan 1979, 200). In this context, K. V. Raman (1975, 3) raises the questions whether this incident might have provided the conceptual distinction into a Shiva- and Vishnu-Kanchi. However, according to Emma Stein, the two designations together with that of Jina-Kanchi came into use only in the second half of the nineteenth century (2021, 36–37).

The arrangement of the Ēkāmparanātar, Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ, and Kumarakōṭṭam temples in Shiva-Kanchi is said to represent Śiva's divine family, or a Somaskanda layout, with Kāmākṣi understood as his wife and Skanda as his son (Hudson 1993, 30). In light of this notion and the general division of Kanchi, Kerstin Schier aptly notes that Kāmākṣi or her Śākta tradition are not separately considered (2018, 17, n 6). Hence, one is inclined to wonder whether the spatial concept found in the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* responds to this disregard for the strong independent Śākta tradition in the allocation of devotional zones of the different religious traditions in the city. In the text's tripartite division, the Goddess is assigned her own specific space of herself, while the idea of a Vaiṣṇava area in the southeast and a Śaiva part in the northwest is kept. It thus adds to a Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava notion of the city rather than contradicting one or the other.

Furthermore, the *Kāmākṣivilāsa* promotes Kanchi as an important place of Goddess worship as it is today and establishes an autonomous narrative of Kāmākṣi as an independent goddess. All this is embedded in the religious South Indian Śrīvidyā tradition that is followed in the Kāmākṣi Ammaṇ temple. The *Māhātmya*, however, equally incorporates Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta material and even appears to keep a balance in the number of sacred places of Devī, Śiva, and Viṣṇu mapped in Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, and Kāmakoṣṭha. The approach, then, does not seem to draft a purely Śākta *Māhātmya* on Kanchi, with praise of Kāmākṣi and/or focus on sites of the Goddess in Kanchi alone. Instead, the tripartite division into a Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta part—within a Śākta framework—creates an impression of deliberate balance. The spatial design is therefore, in my view, conceptualised to claim a territory for the Goddess and especially for Kāmākṣi in Kanchi. It seems quite possible that the spatial outline described in the KV is a response to the conceptualised division of Kanchi into a Śaiva and a Vaiṣṇava devotional zone. In fact, if we follow Emma Stein (2021, 36–37) in dating the introduction of the designations Shiva- and Vishnu-Kanchi to the

second half of nineteenth century and R. Nagaswamy's (1982, 207–208) arguments for a comparatively late composition of the KV sometime around the time of its first printed edition in 1889, the *Māhātmya* and its spatial design could well be placed as addressing the historical establishment of terminologically distinguishing devotional zones in Kanchi in that period.²¹³

5.5 In a Nutshell

The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* presents a uniform, consciously constructed design of Kāñcī's sacred space. My discussion of the text above shows that the spatial arrangement of Kanchi's religious landscape of shrines, temples and sacred water bodies as a starting point and presents and interprets them in a selective but distinctly balanced manner. The KV displays pronounced attention to the spatial belonging, frequently and explicitly localising sacred sites within either Harikṣetra, Rudraśālā, or Kāmakoṣṭha. Additionally, and similar to the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the geography-chapters of the text map conceptually existing places. In its layout of Kāñcī's sacred geography, the text thus clearly relies on the conditions of the historically grown city with the sacred places existing at a certain point in time.

The overall mythical framing reflects a Śākta view on Kāñcī, but similarly establishes a local setting in which the three deities Kāmākṣī, Varadarāja, and Ekāmranātha are equally important and exist in their own right. An overriding Śākta notion is not reflected in the three equally structured text parts. Here, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* follows an inclusive approach that structurally and spatially represents the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta traditions in Kāñcī side by side without hierarchising them among each other. Each is given the same local value, with Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī each assigned a separate territory and myths disentangled from each other. Each part remains a self-contained unit in itself, exclusively highlighting the supremacy of one deity. This design understands Kāñcī to be a sphere of influence of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Devī at the same time, represented by their local

213 R. Nagaswamy, in his study of the Kāmākṣī Ammaṅ temple, argues for a late origin of the KV as the text supposedly describes more recent structures in the Kāmākṣī Ammaṅ temple. As Jonas Buchholz (2022, 20) states, it is difficult to evaluate R. Nagaswamy's arguments as the latter unfortunately does not detail the relevant passages. Jonas Buchholz, though, acknowledges that "the fact that only a single manuscript of the KV can be found might indeed speak in favour of a late date of the text" (2022, 20). For further details, see pp. 85–89.

forms as Varadarāja, Ekāmranātha, and Kāmākṣī. The Śākta Māhātmya may thus be seen as balanced and non-confrontational on the local level with regard to the different religious traditions, while the general framing of the entire text and Kāñcī is Śākta. The contextualisation of Kanchi in the pan-Indian concept of the seats of the Goddess and Kāmākṣī as the goddess of the Śaktipīṭha is echoed in the same interpretation of Kāmākṣī that was increasingly propagated by the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, the monastic institution administering the Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple since the 1840s, as evidenced from publications from the second half of the twentieth century (Venkataraman 1992, 70; Schier 2018, 125, n. 27, 134–137). In particular the former head of the Peetham, Chandrasekharendra Saraswati (1894–1994), sought to actively reinforce the renown of Kāmākṣī and her temple (Wilke 1996, 149).

As a result of the balanced approach, the consideration of sites of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Devī is equitable and focuses on equal numbers of each deity's sites. This portrayal of Kāñcī's sacred places does not represent the numerical distribution of sites in the city, but it best reflects its diverse and multifocal religious landscape. In its general layout, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* can easily be considered a pilgrims' guidebook to Kanchi, presenting the quintessential details of selected sacred places and containing extensive *phalaśruti* passages. However, the separate presentation of each *kṣetra* and the sequence of the sacred places as a result of their grouping by category make the descriptions in the KV less suitable as a guide for a pilgrimage through the whole of Kanchi or even one of the deities' realms. Moving from one site to the next in the indicated order would result in a route with a zigzag course within each area, which would not be practical on the ground in Kanchi. In this context, the preference for a conceptualised structure detracts from the suitability of the KV as a literary map of Kanchi's religious landscape, which is otherwise provided by the text's generally inclusive presentation of the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta traditions, its concise style, and pronounced attention to the locations of the sites of religious significance in Kanchi. The balanced, yet selective elements that are used to interpret the sacred geography, added by the linking narrative about Kāmākṣī, and Varadarāja and Ekāmranātha as created by the Goddess power, are thus best to be understood to refer to a Vaiṣṇava-Śaiva bipartition of Kanchi and the subsequent intention to claim territory for the Goddess in the city. The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* does not counter a Śaiva and/or a Vaiṣṇava interpretation; it incorporates them when sketching a carefully constructed concept of Kāñcī as an important place of the Goddess with a distinct narrative of Kāmākṣī as an independent goddess and her very own spatial domain.