

[Kalahasthi Temple of Andhra Pradesh](#)

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Kalahasthi Temple of Andhra Pradesh

The river Suvarnamukhi takes a northerly course at Kalahasthi almost washing the west wall of the famous Kalahasthi temple in the Chittor District of Andhra Pradesh. Inside this very large temple situated between two steep hills-Sripuram and Mummidicholapuram-is the Siva Linga said to represent the element Vayu (air or wind), whose presence is evidenced by a continuous flame which flickers though there is no loophole for air to enter the temple.

The Linga here is said to have been worshipped in ancient days by a spider, a cobra and an elephant. The spider worshipped the Lord by spinning a web over the Lingam, the snake by placing a gem atop it, and the elephant by washing the Linga with water from its trunk. All three beings are said to have attained Moksha, realization, through their devotion to the Lord. Even the name bears their appellations: Sri (spider) Kala (cobra) Hasthi (elephant).

In the second court of the temple is an underground cell where Lord Ganapathi, called here Patala Vinayaka, is worshipped. The shrine is 30 feet beneath ground level, said to mark the level of the river that passes by. Another unique feature is the bronze figure of the hunter saint, Kannappa, who removed his own eye as an offering to the Lord. The rock-cut mandapam to the southeast of the temple is called the "Maniganniagattam," in memory of a woman into whose right ear Lord Siva whispered the holy Taraka Mantram. Even now, the pious and devout loved ones here who are near to dying and place them upon their right side with the right ear resting upon the ground. At the moment of death, according to temple lore, the body turns 'round to its left side, and the spirit leaves through the right ear.

In a pattern typical for many of the great temples, Kalahasthi was built in many stages over a period of centuries. The initial structure was built by the Pallava Kings and added to by Tondaman Chakravarti. The Chola kings later renovated the shrine and built the main temple around the 10th century. In the 12th century King Veeranasimha Yadavaraya built the present outer prakaras (massive hallways)

and four gopurams. Vijayanagar rulers developed the mandapams inside the temple, and from an inscription of Krishnadevaraya, we find that he built in 1516 the hundredpillared mandapam and the galigopuram. Finally, the Natukootai Chettiars of Devakottai, famous for their charity, gave the final shape to the temple in 1912, at a cost of nearly US\$1 million.

The most prominent festival in the temple is that of Mahasivaratri, which lasts for ten days in February/March. The fifth day corresponds to Sivaratri proper, when pilgrims bathe in the river and keep vigil all through the night. Another major festival is during the third day of Sankranti, when the deity is taken in procession 'round the hills on a circuit of nearly 20 miles.

Srikalahasthi is an ancient place mentioned extensively in the Puranas, and which today attracts thousands of devotees of Siva. Only 30 miles from Tirupati, it can be reached by road from Gudur on the Madras-Vijayawada line.