

Exploring Lord Shaasta

This is a very unique discussion of a concept with roots steeped in Indian spirituality and philosophy yet shrouded in mystery over several thousands of years. The concept of Lord Shaasta, commonly known as Ayyappan or Ayyanaar is seen in all its glory.

Who is Shaasta?

"Antah Pravishta Shaastaa Jananaam Sarvaathma | Sarvaa Praja Yatraikam Bhavanti|", or "Where all are united, He who has entered within, that are born, and is the self of all, is beyond comprehension, He is Shaasta the ruler of all things".

Similarly, in another verse, "Antah Pravishta Shaastaa Jananaam Ekasanbahudaa Vichaara | Shatha Shukraani Yatraikam Bhavanti|".

This is what Taittiriya Aranyaka of the Krishna branch of Yajur Veda says in verses 3-11-1 and 3-11-2. Who is this Shaasta? We need to start from the basics to understand this Lord, also called Vipra Poojya (Worshipped by the Vedas).

The basic premise is the premise of Advaita, ie. the body, mind, world and everything understood by the five senses, thoughts, feelings and memories is unreal, figments of the mind and is the delusion called Maaya, revolving around a false sense of identification with the finite body and mind, also called Ego or Ahankaara. Transcending this Maaya, one kills the Ahankaara and the unreal 'world' to reveal the true Self (Atman), which is infinite, eternal truth (Sat), fundamental consciousness (Chit) and pure unalloyed bliss (Aanandam). This Self is very much the Absolute, Parabrahman, which gives rise to the entire universe through its 'playful act' of Maaya, and thus as the playful source, is called 'Lalitha Ambika', the Universal Mother. Because the Mother is beyond form, descriptions and intellectual comprehension, She is termed 'Nirguna'.

As the epitome of the esoteric Sri Vidya tradition Lalitha Ambika is nothing but the Aanandam or Atman itself, as the ultimate destination in all of Spirituality - "Aham Iti Eva Vibhaavaye Bhavaanim", says the Dhyaana (invocation) of Lalitha Sahasranaamam (1000 names of the Universal Mother).



Lalitha Ambika as Goddess Kamakshi of Kanchipuram

Then comes the triad of Shiva-Shakti-Maayon. Maayon, an ancient Tamil Sangam term is today better known as Narayana, and each of these three is completely non-distinct, completely inseparable and in every way equal to each other. Maayon or Narayana is the realm of Maaya, which is the fundamental canvas on which the universe is created and operates. Maayon, the realm of Maaya, because of the virtue of assuming form is called 'Saguna'. In this realm of Maaya, comes existence of Shiva, called Prakaasha, which is nothing but pure existence, without any understanding of what its nature or features are. Shakti, called the Vimarsha is the attributes such as name, form etc of this existence. For example, is the statement "Apple is tasty" - the scope of the statement is Maayon, existence 'is' is Shiva, and the attribute 'tasty' is Shakti. Without existence and attributes, the realm of Maaya makes no sense, and without the realm of Maaya, existence and attributes do not exist. Thus, all are inseparable and interdependent of each other. Shiva is the Father Appa, Shakti the Mother Amma and Maayon the Revered Ayya.



Maayon-Shakti-Shiva; ShankaraNarayana in Shankarankovil, Tamilnadu

Then comes an interesting stage, as an intermediate between Saguna and Nirguna. To do this, the vertical Saguna-Nirguna duality must assume a horizontal duality. For this, Maayon, along with Shiva and Shakti combine to form a single Saguna aspect, called 'Narayana', and this union takes the place of Shakti. This is the basis of associating Maaya, which is Maayon, as Yoga Maaya or Maha Maaya, the Goddess (Keralites often chant Amme Narayana). Nirguna on the other hand conflates taking the place of Shiva. At this point, Shiva, as Arunachala transcends form and emerges as a tall pillar of fire (The 'Formless Form' of Lingam), and is now called Shankara.

Thus, Shiva-Shakti now becomes Shankara-Narayana, the horizontal manifestation of the vertical Nirguna-Saguna. This Shankara Narayana manifests as Dharma Shaasta or Ayya-Appa (Ayyappan), which is nothing but a two-way bridge between Saguna and Nirguna.

In the upward path of ascent, from Saguna to Nirguna, one sees the Shaasta (Teacher) aspect, where Dharma Shaasta is the Guru (Preceptor), enabling and guiding us towards transcending Maaya and attaining Self-Realization.

In the downward path of descent, from Nirguna to Saguna, one sees the Dharma (Righteousness) aspect (Krishna as Narayana states "Dharma Samsthapana Arthaaya Sambhavaami Yuge Yuge"). Dharma Shaasta thus upholds righteousness, gracing the devout, encouraging discipline and austerity, punishing the wicked and destroying the evil elements and spirits, protecting the people.

Exaggeration of the Shaasta aspect gives rise to the Dakshinamurthi form, seen in temples, whereas exaggeration of Dharma aspect gives rise to Aiyanaar form, seen as a protector village God.

The true form of Ayyappan with both aspects is seen in very few temples where Sri Vidya is predominant (Kanchipuram, Tiruvarur, Papanasam, Sori Muthaiyan Koil, Sabarimala). One can always see Meru, or Sri Yantra, or Goddess as Kamakshi and Kamalamba near the Lord in all these temples, showing His significance as the direct manifestation of Lalitha Ambika, in the extolled position of Guru. In Sabarimala, one sees the words "Tat Tvam Asi" (That Thou Art) at the entrance - this is a golden Mahavakya, showing the direct teaching of the Lord as Guru, to identify with the real Self which is the infinite and blissful Atman. Understanding this important concept of Lord Dharma Shaasta clearly shows the significance of the above Yajur Vedic verse praising the Lord, as well as many other verses in Vedas, Tantras and other treatises extolling the Lord, who combines Shiva, Shakti and Narayana aspects and occupies the highest spiritual significance. As the very Lalitha Ambika in the Guru form, the Lord is the protector and the revealer of the greatest secret - Atma Jnaana, and this is why He is called the Paraaya Guptha.

The Lord is seen as non-different from Lalitha Ambika, and residing in the heart of the Universal Mother, and thus non-different from Baalaa Tripurasundari, the young playful aspect of the Goddess of 9 or 16 years of age, and as the most powerful of Mantras for the Kali Yuga. Also, Baalaa is seen as the most important form of the Goddess for the present Kali Yuga - "Dvaapare Shiva Bhedam Cha Trethaayaam Vaamanam Harim Atha Kaliyuge Shasthaa Yaa Baaleti Nigadyate".



Baalaa Tripura Sundari, Lord Venkatesha of Tirumala

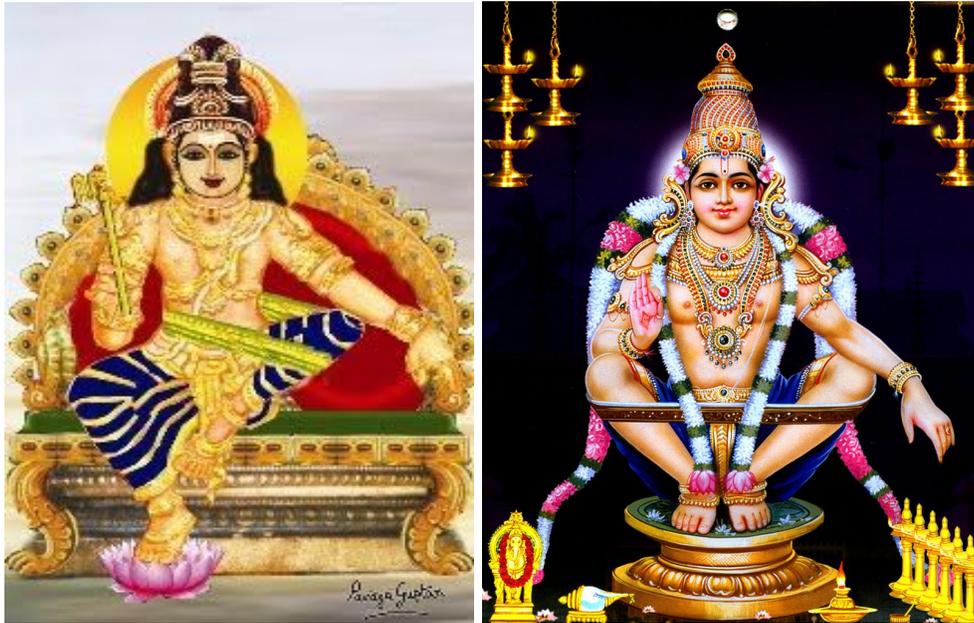
The Lord Srinivaasa, enshrined as the Kali Yuga Varadha Lord Venkateshwara of Thirumala and called Balaji is none other than the Baalaa Herself. In fact, one finds a lot of similarities between Baalaa of Sri Vidya and the Balaji Srinivaasa, the most important among them being the Varadha-Kati Mudra combination of the lower hands, also seen in the shrines of Kanyakumari Bhagavathi and Thiruvaiyaru Dharmasamvardhani. Other important similarities are the Sri Yantra present under the Hundi of Tirupati, Abhishekham to the Lord with turmeric water on fridays, Brhamotsavam of Tirupati coinciding with Navaraatri and the Simha Lalaatam or the lion emblem. One also finds in Thrukodikaval Trikoteeshwara Temple, the shrine where the Mother Tripurasundari, aptly named "Kaatchi Koduttha Ambaal" gave Darshan to the Alwars as Lord Venkatesha of Tirupathi, complete with Shankha, Chakra and Kati Hasta.

Thus, one understands that the two temples of Tirumala and Sabarimala enshrine the same Universal Mother Lalitha Ambika as Baalaa. While in Sabarimala, She is the Guru-Dharma aspect, in Tirumala She is the pure Aanandam aspect obtained by removal (Kata) of all Sins (Ven).

The concepts connected with the significance of Lord Dharma Shaasta are seen in Lalitha Sahasranaamam as Nirguna (139), Govinda Roopini (267), Rudra Roopa (269), Poorna (292), Tatpada Lakshyaartha (363), Paraa (366), Tattvasana (424), Tat (425), Tvam (426), Guru Moorthi (603), Shaastra Mayi (705), Guhya Roopini (707), Guru Mandala Roopini (713), Dakshinamurthi Roopini (725), Pushkara (804), Dharma Dhara (884), Vipra Priya (887), Vipra Roopa (888), Dharmini (958), Jnaana Mudra (979).

Other Yajur Vedic verses extolling the Lord Dharma Shaasta are Taittiriya Aranyaka 5-4-6 , Taittiriya Brahmana 3-10-1-13, 3-10-9-7, Taittiriya Samhita 2-6-9-7, 3-1-8-3, 3-2-4-2, 5-7-4-4 and 6-3-8-4.

Symbolism of Dharma Shaasta



Lord Dharma Shaasta in Veerasana; Yoga Asana in Sabarimala

Typically, Dharma Shaasta is shown with two consorts, namely Purna and Pushkala. These names translate to "Completeness" and "Prosperity", and are allusions to the two paths - Jnaana and Bhakti, through which one reaches the Absolute as Self-Realization.

Rather than the two consorts, these represent the two halves of the Lord himself, in the pure Yogic posture and form one sees at Sabarimala.

The Lord is seen in a unique Yogic posture, sometimes also seen in Lord Narasimha, Dakshinamurthi or Aanjaneya. Here, the Lord is seated upright, with His legs bent and both ankles touching the Mooladhara or root Chakra. The erectness of the posture enables free flow of Kundalini Shakti or the Life force through the seven Chakras. It is humanly difficult to maintain such a posture for long duration, and to prevent the legs from straying away, the Lord has a band (Yoga Pattai) tying his legs with the back.

The right hand of the Lord shows the Chinmudra, holding index finger and thumb together, with the other fingers held straight. Those three fingers middle, ring and little fingers are said to represent the three states of Jaagraka (Waking), Svapna (Dream) and Sushupti (Deep Sleep). The index finger is the Maaya as mis-identification or Ahankaara that pervades through these states. Bringing the index finger to the thumb symbolizes killing of the Ahankaara, and merging the sense of self with the true Self or Atman, represented as the thumb.

Thus, Chin-Mudra, or the gesture of concentration, consciousness and reality is the true and ultimate teaching of Self-Realization. One sees this exact same Mudra in the form of Dakshinamurthi. Thus, the right half of Dharma Shaasta highlights the teacher or Shaasta Aspect, and this is precisely Poorna Devi - completeness of wisdom, knowledge and understanding of reality.

The left hand of the Lord rests on His leg, pointing towards His feet. In all seated forms of Ayyappan, one will definitely see the left leg lifted up, irrespective of whether the right leg is lifted up (as in Yoga Asana form in Sabarimala) or hangs down (as in Veera Asana forms in other temples). Thus, depending on the height of the statue, when the devotee stands or sits before the Lord, he will find the Lord's raised feet at the level of the heart. This, and the Lord pointing to His feet, is His message to place His feet firmly in the heart (Hrudkamalam). The Lord as Krishna or Narayana says the same in the Bhagawad Gita - "Maam Ekam Sharanam Vraja".

Having the Lord's feet in the heart and constantly contemplating on Him is the cultivation of Bhakti or Divine Love, and this is also the easiest way to cultivate Sattva Guna, good conduct and Dharma, and ultimately reach the Lord. Thus, the left half of Dharma Shaasta highlights the righteousness or Bhakti or Dharma Aspect, and this is precisely Pushkala Devi.

Thus, the two consorts, or rather the two halves of the Lord signify the concept of Dharma-Shaasta with predominance of Narayana and Shankara aspects respectively.

Shaasta in Temples

Having understood the significance and symbolism of Dharma Shaasta, it is interesting to now examine the historical evolution of the concept, through various temples, keeping in mind this essence of the above discussion: **Dharma Shaasta or Ayyappan is a Saguna-Nirguna form, emphasizing Righteousness (Dharma, Bhakti) and Wisdom (Jnaana) as His left and right halves, through the conflated aspects of Shankara-Shiva and Narayana-Shakti.**

A. Shaasta

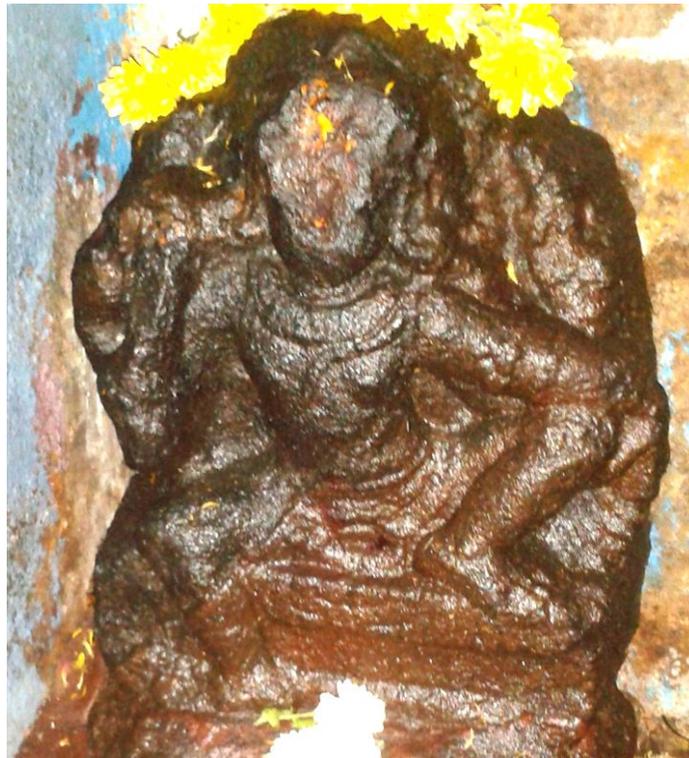
As a starting step, we note that the verse in Yajur Veda Taittiriya Aranyaka 3-11-2 mentions the name of the Lord as just "Shaasta" (as in contrast to "Dharma Shaasta"), despite containing descriptions of both Shaasta ('Antah Pravishta', 'Sarvaatma') and Dharma ('Sarvaa Praja') aspects. The same trend is seen in other verses from the Vedas too. Being the earliest known mention of the Shaasta, this can be taken to be the earliest representation of the Lord Dharma Shaasta under the name of Shaasta. In the set of ten verses called Saastha Dashakam, one finds the sixth verse as: **"Trayambaka puraadheesam Ganaadhipa Samanvitham Gajaaroodham Aham Vande Shaastaaram pranamaamyaham"** - (I salute that God Saastha, Who rides on an elephant, Who is the king of Tryambaka, And who is near to Lord Ganesa).

This description also coincides with the Yajur Vedic verse, and also indicates the mount of the Lord (Vaahana) to be the elephant (Gajaaroodham).

Spiritually, the Vedas, culminating in Vedaanta or Upanishads are epitomes of the Jnaana path towards Self-Realization. Thus, these texts are always interested and focused on the ascent from Saguna to Nirguna and not vice versa. This is the reason why, though both aspects of Dharma and Shaasta has been mentioned, the latter alone has stuck as the name of the Lord in Yajur Veda.

Even in Sri Vidya, the same suit follows, with the tradition describing the flow of life force Kundalini energy from root Chakra Mooladhara through the seven Chakras or wheels of energies to the Sahasraara, merging with Shiva there, with the ascent of Saguna to Nirguna resulting in Self-Realization.

Thus, even though possessing Wisdom and Righteousness aspects, the Lord is almost always enshrined in Vedic and Sri Vidya contexts in the position of Guru, guiding the devout towards Self-Realization. This earliest representation of the Lord as Shaasta, is seen mainly in two temples:



Lord Shaasta in Thiruvarur

1. Thiruvarur - As one of the earliest and foremost Kshetras, this place, enshrining Thyagaraja and Kamalaamba as principal deities, is seen as the very capital of Sri

Vidya. From Skanda Puraana Naagara Khaandam, one understands that the Kshetra dates back to much earlier periods to the shrine of Haatakeswara, asserted by Lord Shiva Himself to be the most important and powerful among the 68 Shiva Peethas. One sees the Sri Vidya aspect in almost every shrine of Thiruvavur temple, making it the foremost Kshetra for all the Shanmatha deities including Jalashaayina Vishnu, Mooladhara Ganapathi, Baalasubrahmanya and Pushpa Aaditya, apart from Thyagaraja. Also known as the very primordial or Mooladhara Kshetra, in this temple complex, Kamalaamba, seen as the Universal Mother Lalitha Ambika is seen with a separate small temple, and in this temple, one finds Lord Shaasta under the name of Sri Vidya Shaasta. With the lack of any Dakshinamurthi shrine in the Kamalaamba temple, the Lord is enshrined as the Guru aspect. The symbolism of this deity is similar to the shrine of Sabarimala discussed earlier, but with two key differences. The right leg hangs down in a Veerasana, as opposed to the Sabarimala Yogaasana. Secondly, the right hand of Lord Ayyappan in Sabarimala holds the Chinmudra gesture, signifying killing of ego and transcending of Maaya, ascending from Saguna to Nirguna. However, in Thiruvavur, the Lord holds a red lily flower with a long stem. Dikshitar mentions this in the Hariharaputram song as "Phulla Kalhaara Danda Dharakaram". It is interesting to note that the Universal Mother Kamalaamba, as the very Nirguna aspect, holds a red Trumpet flower (Paatali Pushpa), whereas Neelotpalamba, another manifestation of the Mother in the same temple complex and whose name itself contains the word 'Utpala' meaning lily, holds a water lily with a long stem. Thus, in contrast with the transcendence from Saguna to Nirguna, the Lord Shaasta in Thiruvavur exhibits pure Nirguna aspect in the right half, and holds the flower in His right hand to show the complete non-difference between Him as the Guru, and the Lalitha Ambika. Dikshitar highlights this aspect in the previous line "Pushpa Sharekshu Kaarmuka Dharam" - the Lord is visualized to hold sugarcane bow and flowery arrows (a form mentioned as Sammohana Shaasta within the Lord's eight incarnations), where these are the primary weapons of the Mother. Even in the popular Shloka "Aashyaama Komala" chanted in Sabarimala shrine, the Lord is visualized as holding a flower ("Arunotpala Dama Hastam"), while there are no physical statues or shrines of this representation. Thus, with lack of any other temple or representation completely matching Vedic References, Sri Vidya Significances and Iconographic representations, one can conclude with reasonable certainty that Thiruvavur, the Mooladhara Kshetra has the first and foremost shrine of Lord Shaasta anywhere in the world. There is a tradition of worshipping Lord Shaasta in 51 different forms corresponding to the 51 Aksharas of the Sanskrit alphabet, in a tradition similar to ones adopted for Lord Ganesha and Maatraka Devatas. It is interesting here to note that Thiruvavur is considered the foremost and combined power of the 51 Shakti Peethas spread all over the subcontinent enshrining the 51 Aksharas. As a testimony to this fact, one finds in the same temple of Kamalaamba, an Akshara Peetha with the 51 Aksharas engraved in an orb (Prabha). As the only Kshetra to exhibit both the Shaasta and Akshara Maatraka shrines, one can infer that this tradition must have originated in Thiruvavur. At the end of each Akshara recitation, the tradition is to finish by chanting the

phrase “Swaamin Sharanam Aaryapa” - which could be the predecessor of the familiar Swamiye Sharanam Ayyappa.



2. Aryankavu - As one of the six temples corresponding to the six Chakras, Lord Shaasta in Aryankavu is seen seated, though in a slightly different posture than the usual Veerasana, yet holding a flower, similar to Thiruvarur. As perhaps the only shrine to exhibit this representation apart from Thiruvarur, the Kshetra can be understood of reasonable antiquity as among the first shrines of Lord Shaasta, directly after Thiruvarur. The shrine is praised by Dikshitar in the same song as “Shauri Giri Vihaaram”, with Shauri translating to Arya or noble. The current icon (Vigraha) in the temple is a replaced one with the earlier one damaged due to an accident. While by original history the Lord is shown seated alone, in a relatively much recent history, the Lord is believed to have married a Saurashtrian girl of unerring and pure devotion, and thus, one sees the Goddess, by the name of Pushkala, near the Lord.
3. Trayambakapuram - the temple mentioned in the above prayer, this can be found near Thiruvarur in Tamilnadu, under the name of Erumathalai village near Sengalipuram. The Lord is enshrined in the form of a young boy - Baala Shaasta, and is seen as a small idol of 1 foot height, riding an elephant. At this stage, one notices apart from the introduction of the elephant mount also seen in Aryankavu, another significant change. The flower in the Lord’s hand is now replaced by a weapon known as ‘Chindu’, a kind of whip with a staff. These features correspond closest with the Maha Shaasta among 8 incarnations of the Lord.

The concept of Shaasta with this form and its variations can be found in many places internationally, such as Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. So too, the temple of Shaasta as Duraiyappa in the historic Korkkai, Tuticorin, is mentioned in the Skanda Puraana.

One also observes other variations in the form such as right hand resting on the thigh rather than holding anything, seen in Kudumiyanmalai, Tamilnadu and Suruttappalli, Andhra Pradesh. Also, Lord Shaasta appears with interchanged position of left and right legs in Adhishaya Shaasta, Kanyakumari, Tamilnadu.



Lord Shaasta in Kudumiyanmalai, Suruttappalli; from Chola period in Chennai Museum



Lord Shaasta in Aryankavu, Kerala; Trayambakapuram, Kanyakumari, Tamilnadu



Adhisaya Shaasta, Kanyakumari; Yoga Shaasta, Kumbakonam; Duraiyappa, Korkkai

In Aadi Kumbeshwara temple, Kumbakonam, one finds a unique posture of Lord Shaasta in Yoga, with both legs crossed. Other variations of the form include a Padmaasana posture in Kollangottu, Kozhikode, as well as the Achankovil posture with legs slightly interchanged in Perumbavoor, Ernakulam.



Lord Shaasta in Sri Lanka, Kollangottu and Perumbavoor

B. Aadi Bhoothanaatha

Eight principal incarnations of Lord Dharma Shaasta are most often worshipped, and among these, the first and earliest is the Aadi Bhoothanaatha form. Here, the Lord is seen very similar to the earlier “Shaasta” form, but with the addition of the two consorts Poorna and Pushkala. This is in alignment with the famous prayer “**Gajaaroodham Mahaadevam Sarva Vidhya Pradaayinam Poorna Pushkala Pathim Devam Vandhe Hariharaathmajam**”. It is in this form that the Lord gives Darshan to Sage Agastya in the temple of Sori Muthaiyan Koil near Papanasam in Tirunelveli district, Tamilnadu. This temple is considered to be the foremost of

the six Kshetras of Lord Shaasta corresponding with six Chakras, with Muthaiyan Koil representing the Mooladhara Chakra. Here, the Lord gave Darshan to the sage, while all the Devas (Gods) were showering (Soriyum) gold (Pon), and hence the original name Pon Soriyum Muthaiyan.



Lord Shaasta in Sori Muthaiyan Koil, Achankovil and Kanchipuram Kamakshi temple

This form denotes a transition from earlier Shaasta representation to a slightly less subtle level, with the two aspects of Jnaana and Bhakti represented as two consorts of the Lord. One finds this representation in many more temples, including the one installed by Lord Parashurama in Achankovil, Pathanamthitta, Kerala - another of the six Chakra Shaasta temples. One also finds the form in Kanchipuram Kamakshi Temple, a temple as the very center of Sri Vidya enshrining the Universal Mother as Kamakshi. This shrine is gigantic, at almost 6 feet tall, and worshipped popularly in the past as a local cult, along with the king Karikaala Chola, who won wars appeasing this deity.

One also sees this form in Thirupattur, near Trichy, Tamilnadu, more than 1000 years old, which has sources such as the Periya Puraanam referring to the deity as "Saathanaar". Similarly, the temple of Nadukkavudaiyar in Shanthinagar area of Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli has references in the Skanda Puraana as "Champaka Aranya Goptha".



Lord Shaasta in Thirupattur, Palayamkottai

One finds similar forms of Lord Shaasta with or without consorts in almost every major temple in Tamilnadu, irrespective of region such as Chera, Chola, Pandya or Pallava. Examples include Kanchipuram, Thanjavur, Madurai, Tirunelveli and Rameswaram. In Thiruvavur itself, one understands the existence of another Lord Shaasta shrine in Thyagaraja Praharam, installed possibly by Chola King such as Manu Needhi, for success in conquests. However, the shrine is no longer in existence, and a new form of the idol now exists in "Panaiyadi Ayyanar Temple", few hundred metres away from the main temple. So too, in Mahabalipuram, Tamilnadu, one finds Shaasta astride an elephant (Gajaaroodham) flanked by Poorna and Pushkala.



Lord Shaasta in Thanjavur Brihadeeswara and Thiruvavur Thyagaraja Temples



Lord Shaasta in Tirunelveli Nellaippar and Mahabalipuram Temples

However, in some temples in Kerala, one sees Lord Shaasta, not with two consorts, but with Prabha, a single Goddess embodying both aspects of Jnaana and Bhakti. The Lord is seen with the Goddess and a son, Satyaka, similar to the Shaiva Somaskanda Moorthi, which is an allusion to Truth (Satya) and Sattva Guna - the means by which one can reach the Guru and further, to Self-Realization. This form coincides with the "Santhaana Pradha Shaasta", another of the Lord's 8 incarnations, and is what one sees in many Kerala temples including the powerful Kshetra of Thrikunnapuzha which is the foremost among 108 Kerala Shaasta Temples established by Lord Parashuraama. This is also one of the forms extolled by Aadi Shankara.



Lord Santhaana Pradha Shaasta with Prabha and Satyaka

As the overlord of Bhoothas, Shaasta is also the overlord of incarnations, where every incarnation of every deity that manifests on the earth is required to obtain the permission of Shaasta prior to the venture. It is in this line that one finds the temple of Narasimha Shaasta in Aadipuram, Tuticorin, where Lord Narasimha is seen offering the first worship to Shaasta and then to Himself.



Aadipuram Narasimha Shaasta with Meru

C. Dakshinamurthi

Meanwhile, conventional Shiva and Vishnu temples came to be established in various regions, in accordance with Vedic and Agamic procedures. In the context of Lord Shaasta, all these temples drew inspiration from the Yajur Vedic verses and the earliest representations in Sri Vidya Temples such as Thiruvavur.

What was subsequently seen is a gradual transition of the representation of Lord Shaasta to a more Shaiva form, highlighting the Shankara or Shaasta aspect as the Guru, and gradual absorption into a principal Shaiva form that would in later days be known as Dakshinamurthi.

The key element enabling such transition was the form of Lord Dharma Shaasta as Jnaana or Vidhya Shaasta, seen as another among the 8 incarnations. This representation shows the Lord seated under a banyan tree, holding the book and the musical instrument Veena, and surrounded by disciples, and praised in invocation (Dhyaana) as South (Dakshina) facing. This representation came to be known in due course as a completely new name - Veena Dakshinamurthi. The Dhyaana Mantra of Jnaana Shaasta goes as “Om Veena Pustakadhara Dakshinamoorthi Shaastre Namah”.



Sri Vidya Shaasta, Veena Dakshinamurthi and Kuthalam, Tamilnadu

One finds this representation in the temples of Kuthalam and Dharmapuram, Tamilnadu, while Sri Vidya Shaasta is enshrined in Vedikarampalaiyam, Salem, Tamilnadu. One can see the form of Lord Sri Vidya Shaasta four-armed with the Veena, standing under the banyan tree holding a book, and facing south, along with consorts Poorna and Pushkala in the temple of Melapattam, in Palayamkottai part of Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu. One sees a similar form as Veena Dakshinamurthi in Lalgudi, Tamilnadu. This is a key intermediary stage between Shaasta and Dakshinamurthi. Also, in Poonjar, Kottayam, Lord Shaasta appears in standing posture, holding in His right hand, the Grantha or Holy Book symbolizing the Vedas and wisdom.



Poonjar Shaasta, Lalgudi Veena Dakshinamurthi; Melapattam Vidya Shaasta

The next stage in the transition is seen as the eschewing of the Veena aspect retaining the pure Jnaana aspect alone with the generic name of Dakshinamurthi. In the Shaiva-Vaishnava temple of Cumbum, Tamilnadu enshrining Kashi Vishwanatha-Kambaraya Venkatesha, one can see the shrine of 'Kamandala Dakshinamurthi', very similar to the Veerasana posture of Dharma Shaasta including the band (Verea Pattai), as well as left hand pointing towards the Lord's feet.



Jnaana Shaasta; Kamandala Dakshinamurthi in Cumbum, Tamilnadu



Dakshinamurthi in Suruttapalli, Thiruvaiyaru and Alangudi

In the famous temple of Thiruvaiyaru, Tamilnadu, one sees Dakshinamurthi with the Trishoola weapon - a clear Shaiva representation, while stamping on a tortoise.

In fact, in the Kaalaagni Rudra Upanishad, we see Lord Shiva praised as Sarva Shaasta, whereas in the Maitrayani Upanishad, we see the Lord Shaasta said to be the same as Prajapathi, Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva and so on.

Another approach to the transition is seen in the form of Shaasta known as Jnaana Shaasta, seated under the banyan tree in Veerasana, with four disciples, similar to Dakshinamurthi. While the shrine in Cumbum closely resembles this, one finds in a similar posture Lord Thaambathya Dakshinamurthi along with consort Tharaa in the famous Shiva temple of Surutapalli, Andhra Pradesh.

Finally with all aspects such as the Veerasana, banyan tree, Chinmudra, leg stamping the Muyalakan Asura and the unique hairstyle, one sees the completion of the Shaasta to Dakshinamurthi transition in most Shiva temples including Alangudi, reverred as the Guru Kshetra.

In fact, in the Guru Kshetra of Alangudi, for the Dakshinamurthi Moolavar idol, one sees four Utsava Moorthis of Lord Shaasta, in Aadi Bhoothanaatha, Kalyaana Shaasta, Adaikkalam Kaattha Shaasta and Vidya Shaasta forms.



Utsava Moorthis of Alangudi Guru Kshetra

Also, among the six great temples (Aru Padai Veedu) of Lord Murugan, Swamimalai, Tamilnadu is seen as the Guru aspect, where the Lord Murugan expounds the meaning of Pranava Aum to His father Shiva, after imprisoning Lord Brahma for His ignorance in the subject. For this reason, Lord Murugan here is known as Brahma Shaasta, and being a Guru aspect, one finds the Moolavar of Lord Shaasta as both Guru and Bhoothanaatha, as well as Utsava Moorthi.



Moolavar, Utsavar and Bhoothanaatha Shaasta, Swamimalai

Finally, one observes that the name “Shaasta” occurs in the Dakshinamurthi and Medha Dakshinamurthi Sahasranaamas, whereas “Dakshinamurthi” occurs in Hariharaputra Shaasta Sahasranaamam, assertively confirming that Shaasta, the Guru is indeed Dakshinamurthi.

D. Aiyanaar

While Veda and Agama based temples were evolving with the Dakshinamurthi transition, the other sections of society, comprising mainly of non-brahmins in various professions, developed a different version of the Lord Dharma Shaasta. With lack of knowledge or lack of access to Vedaanta and the related concepts, the ascent of Saguna to Nirguna was not given much importance. Rather, the descent from Nirguna to Saguna, with the Lord seen as the upholder of Dharma was celebrated. Thus, the Lord evolved to become a protector God, destroying evil elements, and protecting the devout people with their property and livestock. This Dharma Shaasta or Ayyappan as a village God, focussing almost exclusively on the Dharma or Narayana aspect, came to be called as Aiyanaar, eschewing the “Appan” aspect.

As such, the Lord is usually seen as a small shrine in the borders of villages and towns, also seen outside temples as cement idols, seated on a large horse, and occasionally carrying a sword. The Lord is typically appeased with various village rituals, and might include animal sacrifices. Examples of such temples are Aiyanaar is Karkuvel in Thoothukudi district, and Mallur in Salem. Occasionally, one might see the Lord standing and wielding a sword, flanked by Poorna and Pushkala, as in Koodankulam, Tirunelveli.



Lord Aiyanaar; Karkuvel Ayyanar



Lord Shaasta as Aiyanaar in Koodankulam, Mallur

E. Manikantan

Seen as the key incarnation of Lord Dharma Shaasta, the most popular among various legends of Manikantan, named so because of a bell around His neck, is best given as follows:

Lord Ayyappa had His human sojourn as the son of the Raja of Pandalam. At that time, Raja Rajasekhara Pandiyan ruled the kingdom of Pandalam. During one of his hunting expeditions, the Raja was puzzled to hear the wails of a child on the banks of the river Pampa, and was surprised to find a resplendent infant there. The beautiful baby with radiant face wore a bead ('mani') around his neck. The King, though pious, charitable, just, and God-fearing, had no children. He accepted the child as God's gracious response to his fervent prayer for an heir to his throne. Manikandan grew into a boy well versed in academic lore and martial arts. Meanwhile, the Rani gave birth to a son. The King regarded Manikandan as his elder son. He decided to crown him as the Yuvaraja. The King's corrupt Minister had a deep dislike for Manikandan, and made the innocent Queen believe that ill would befall her if Manikandan was crowned Yuvaraja and that the kingdom actually belonged to her son.

They conspired to get rid of Manikandan by hook or crook. They bribed the royal physician into becoming an accomplice of theirs. The Rani pretended to be afflicted with severe pain in the stomach, and the physician prescribed the milk of a tigress as the only cure. The King knew that none could be deputed for a mission that was so patently suicidal. However, the youthful and valiant Manikandan stepped forth and volunteered to fetch the milk. Despite the worried protestations of his foster-father, he set out for the fearful forests.

Days later, Manikandan entered the palace precincts riding a fierce tigress and followed by a pack of its cubs. The schemers were frightened into confessing their nefarious plot. They and others now knew that Manikandan was no ordinary being. They were convinced of His divine origins, and prayed to Him to be with them for their own salvation and for the safety of the kingdom. However, Manikandan was now determined to leave the place.

Filled with happiness, grief, fear, wonder and bhakti and self-surrender, the king prayed for the mercy and blessings of Manikandan. He repented he could not fully visualize the truth of the divine powers of the Lord and repeatedly requested Him to forgive him for behaving as if He were only his son. The Lord lovingly embraced the King who continued to pray: " Lord, kindly bless me by freeing me from my egos and the worldly life of birth and rebirth and grant me ' moksha' (salvation). Kindly continue to be the saviour of my family and stay eternally in my kingdom." Manikandan then enlightened the King on the path of attainment of 'moksha'. These words of the Lord are contained in 'Bhuthanathageetha'. To the King who is by now mentally cleansed and completely immersed in 'bhakthi', Lord Ayyappa said: "I am to free you from all worldly sorrows & worries and to grant you 'moksha'. All those who are and would be born in your family shall have my blessings unflinching. I am always accessible to 'bhakthi' and only 'bhakthi.'" The Lord told the King that he could construct a temple at Sabarimala, north of the holy river Pampa and install His deity there. Ayyappa also explained how the Sabarimala pilgrimage shall be undertaken, emphasizing the importance of 'vratham' and what the devotees can attain by His 'darshan'.

The Lord further consoled the King saying that the devotees who held him and his descendants in 'bhakthi' shall happen to be devoted to Him as well. Manikandan then blessed the King and all others assembled there, and vanished. The King duly constructed the temple at Sabarimala, dedicated to Him.

Similar to this narration is that of Arya Kerala Varman, also considered to be an incarnation of Shaasta. These narrations form the basis of Lord Shaasta shrines in temples such as Achankovil, Sabarimala and Erumeli, as well as dynasties such as Pandya and Pandalam.

Important among the various rituals and practices of Sabarimala is the Padi Pooja, embodying the concept and worship of 18 steps that lead to the Lord's shrine. While representation of the 18 hills in the path and surrounding Sabarimala, the first five steps are also explained as symbolizing the five sense organs or Jnaanendriya (Ear, Nose, Eye, Tongue and Skin). Steps

Six to Thirteen represent the eight afflictions (Kaama, Krodha, Moha, Lobha, Madha, Maatsarya, Ahankara and Paapa). Steps fourteen to sixteen denote the three Gunas - Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Steps Seventeen and Eighteen denote Vidya and Avidya, the duality of knowledge-ignorance. Each of these steps are also believed to be ruled by a 'Padi-Devata'. These eighteen deities are Naaga Yakshi, Mahisha Mardhini, Annapoorna, Kaali, Krishna Kaali, Shakti Bhairavi, Kaarthaveerya Arjuna Sudarshana, Karuppa Swami, Hidimba, Vethaala, Naagaraaja, Renuka, Svapna Vaaraahi, Pratyangira, Bhooma Devi and the three Astra Devatas of Aghora, Paashupatha and Mrityunjaya.

Among the 8 incarnations of Lord Shaasta, the representations of Aiyandar and Manikantan coincide with the Kiraatha or Veera Shaasta, shown standing tall, armed with bow and arrows. This is the form one finds enshrined in most Shaasta temples in Kerala, including Kulathupuzha and Erumeli, two of the temples of the six Chakras, as well as Kuthiran Hill, Thrissur.



Lord Manikantan, Lord Shaasta in Kulathupuzha and Erumeli, Kerala

One also understands that this is the most common aspect one sees Lord Shaasta in Regions other than Tamilnadu and Kerala:

1. In Tummagunta, Andhra Pradesh, the Lord is worshipped as Gurunaatha, seated on a lion with sword, shield, Abhaya and Varadha (Fearlessness-Boons) gestures.
2. In Bengal, the Lord is worshipped as Devottama (Debottam) with similar form.
3. In Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh as well as Girnar, Gujarat historically known as Raivathagiri, the Lord is worshipped as Revantha, shown three-eyed, riding a horse, and holding a noose (Paasha) and staff (Dandam).
4. In Kashi, among the Nath tradition and in festivities such as the Kumbh Mela, the Lord is appeased first, similar to the worship of Lord Ganesha before starting rituals like the Chandi Homam.
5. One also finds references of Lord Shaasta worship in ancient Egypt, the famed mysterious Mt.Shasta of California, USA and other places.



Shaasta as Kuthiran Aappan, Tummagunta Gurunaatha, Sarnath Revantha

F. Other Forms

While the above forms signify the most popular ones of Lord Ayyappan as the Vedic Shaasta, Dakshinamurthi with predominance of Shaasta aspect, Aiyanaar with predominance of Dharma aspect and Manikanta as incarnation, there are other forms in which the Lord is enshrined in temples. Significant among them are two:

1. The temple of Kutraalam in Tirunelveli district, Tamilnadu enshrines Lord Shiva as the dancing Nataraja in the 'imagery hall' of Chitra Sabha - one of five such Sabhas of the Lord's dance. In this depiction of the Lord's dance as a painting, one finds Lord Dharma Shaasta as Yogeeshwara, seated below and playing percussion instrument Ghatam in tune with Lord Shiva's dance.
2. In Tirunelveli district, one finds the temple of Karanthapuri in Kallidaikurichi, where Lord Shaasta, called Kulathooril Ayyan is enshrined in formless aspect, as an engraved Sri Yantra, which is the symbolic (geometrical) representation of the Universal Mother Lalitha Ambika. During Shaasta Preethi festivities, the deity is invoked through decorated lamps and other rituals. The Sahasranaama of Shaasta too shares many names with Lalitha Sahasranaama, such as Pancha Brahma Paraayana, Hreemkaara Rasa, Suprabha, Bindupriya and Baidavaasana.
3. Given that the Pandalam dynasty can be dated no earlier than 1100AD, and that Sabarimala as a Shaasta Kshetra existed before that, one understands that Lord Shaasta existed here in the form of a Sri Yantra, similar to Karanthapuri, and that the place was aptly chosen by Manikanta to conclude His human incarnation and reach 'Aikyam' (Oneness) with the Shaasta, seated on the Sri Yantra, in a Yogic pose as described earlier.
4. In Rajakkalmangalam, Nanguneri, Lord Shaasta is enshrined as Lingam form, as per a boon given by Lord Shiva at the end of the former's mission.

5. Among the eight incarnations of Lord Shaasta, all but two have been covered in previous sections. The first is Kalyana Varadha Shaasta, shown with multiple arms carrying various weapons similar to Goddess Durga, while the second is Veda Shaasta, shown seated on a lion with Poorna and Pushkala, with one or sometimes four faces, believed to be the origin of the Vedas taking on the role of Lord Brahma, as Brahma Shaasta.
6. There are six temples of Shaasta in Tamilnadu-Kerala signifying the six Chakras of Kundalini Yoga - Sorimuthaiyan Koil, Achankovil, Aryankavu, Kulathupuzha, Erumeli and Sabarimala, with all these six forms discussed earlier. However, for the seventh or Sahasraara Chakra at the crown of the head, Lord Shaasta is said to reside on Kanthamalai, which is outside the physical plane, similar to Lord Narayana's Vaikuntham. However, just as Srirangam is considered Bhooloka Vaikuntham, Ponnambalamedu in Pathanamthitta, also called Kanchanadri is considered the physical equivalent of Kanthamalai. As one of the hills surrounding Sabarimala, this is believed to be where Lord Parashuraama first consecrated Aadi Bhoothanaatha Shaasta in gold, and later destroyed by a dacoit. Lord Ayyappan is said to have merged with the Jyothi at Ponnambalamedu, legend of the famous Makara Jyothi celebrations every year.



Lord Shaasta seated as Yogeshwara in Kutralam, Tamilnadu



Shaasta as Peetham in Kulathooril Ayyan, Karanthapuri, Tamilnadu



Shaasta as Lingam in Rajakkalmangalam, Peetham in Ponnambalamedu



The eight forms of Lord Shaasta (Aadi Bhoothanaatha, Kalyaana Varadha, Maha, Sammohana, Santhaana Praapthi, Veera, Jnaana and Veda) with along with Manikanta

Understanding the Shaasta Concept

After having explored various aspects in the significance, evolution and iconography of Shaasta, one understands the antiquity and other intricate details of this as a system of worship, as well as a spiritual concept in the place of Guru and upholding Dharma, embodying the twin paths of Jnaana and Bhakti.

In the context of Sri Vidya, the Atman, which is the Eternal Nirguna Parabrahman, as Sat-Chit-Aanandam, is seen as the Universal Mother Lalitha Ambika Herself. Lalitha Sahasranaamam too attests this fact as the 617 Naama - "Om Aatmane Namah". With this in mind, one notes in verses 3-11-1 and 3-11-2 in the Yajur Veda Taittiriya Aranyaka, the Lord Shaasta being extolled as Aatma and Sarvaatma, thus seen as the same as the Universal Mother Herself. As evidence of this, one notes three important points:

1. One finds a strong Sri Vidya-Shaasta connection in temples, starting with Lord Shaasta shrines in Kanchipuram and Thiruvavarur, both Sri Vidya centres. Further, Shaasta is worshipped as Sri Yantra in Karanthapuri, Tirunelveli, and Sabarimala, Kerala, much before the incarnation of Manikantan. In Sori Muthaiyan Koil where Shaasta gives Darshan to sage Agastya, we see the Sri Yantra as Mahameru.
2. The Yajur Veda refers to the Lord as "Shaastaa", with the "Aa" extension seen as a term usually used for feminine deities such as Durga, Amba, Ramaa, Baalaa and so on.

3. Aadi Shankara has composed the Keshaadi Paada Varnana of Lord Shaasta as a Shloka starting with “Aashaanu Roopa Phaladam”. It is interesting to note that while portraying deities (Varnana) there is a specific order to be followed. Female deities are described from head to toe (Keshaadi Paada) - this is the order followed for Lalitha Ambika in Lalitha Sahasranamam as well as Aadi Shankara’s Saundaryalahari. For male deities, the order is from toe to head (Paadaadi Kesha) - Aadi Shankara follows this order for Lord Vishnu Varnana. Lord Shiva, being Shiva-Shakti Ardhanareeshwari Swarooma is extolled in two Varnanas by Aadi Shankara, one Paadaadi Kesha and another Keshaadi Paada. However, for Lord Shaasta, Aadi Shankara follows Keshaadi Paada - seeing the Shaasta concept as the same as Lalitha Ambika Herself.

Thus, at the Vedic age, a time before any worship with forms was prevalent, Lord Shaasta, the Guru was seen as the Atma, non-different from the Mother Herself, just as Ramana Maharishi says, the ultimate Guru is one’s own Self. As reference, the following is the text of Yajur Veda Taittiriya Aranyaka, section 3-11, where one can observe Lord Shaasta being extolled in various aspects pertaining to the Atman.

[[3-11-1]]

suvarnaṃ gharmaṃ pariveda venam |
 indrasyaātmānaṃ daśadhā carantam |
 antassamudre manasā carantam |
 brahmā'nvavindaddaśahotāramarṇe |
 antaḥ praviṣṭaśśāstā janānām |
 ekassanbahudhā vicāraḥ |
 śataṃ śukrāṇi yatraikaṃ bhavanti |
 sarve vedā yatraikaṃ bhavanti |
 sarve hotāro yatraikaṃ bhavanti |
 sa mānasīna ātmā janānām || 20 ||

[[3-11-2]]

antaḥ praviṣṭaśśāstā janānām sarvātmā |
 sarvāḥ prajā yatraikaṃ bhavanti |
 caturhotāro yatra sampadaṃ gacchanti devaiḥ |
 sa mānasīna ātmā janānām |
 brahmendramagniṃ jagataḥ pratiṣṭhām |
 diva ātmānaṃ savitāraṃ bṛhaspatim |
 caturhotāraṃ pradīso'nukṛptam |
 vāco vīryaṃ tapasā'nvavindat |
 antaḥ praviṣṭaṃ kartārametaṃ |
 tvaṣṭāraṃ rūpāṇi vikurvantaṃ vipāscim || 21 ||

[[5-4-6]]

arcirasi śocirasītyāha |
 teja evāsmīnbrahmavarcaṣaṃ dadhāti |
 saṃśīdasva mahāṃ asītyāha |

mahān hyeṣaḥ |
 brahmavādīno vadanti |
 ete vāva ta ṛtvijaḥ |
 ye darśapūrṇamāsayoḥ |
 atha kathā hotā yajamānāyāśīṣo nā''śāsta iti |
 purastādāśīḥ khalu vā anyo yajñaḥ |
 upariṣṭādāśīranyaḥ || 35 ||

Verses from Taittiriya Brahmana

[[3-10-9-7]]

atha yadāha |
 prastutaṃ viṣṭutaṃ sutā sunvatīti |
 eṣa eva tat |
 eṣa hyeva tānyahāni |
 eṣa rātrayaḥ |
 atha yadāha |
 citraḥ keturdātā pradātā savitā prasavitā'bhiśāstā'numanteti |
 eṣa eva tat |
 eṣa hyeva te'hno muhūrtāḥ |
 eṣa rātreḥ || 7 ||

[[1-4-10-1]]

agnirvāva saṃvatsaraḥ |
ādityaḥ parivatsaraḥ |
candramā idāvatsaraḥ |
vāyuranuvatsaraḥ |
yadvaiśvadevena yajate |
agnimeva tatsaṃvatsaramāpnoti |
tasmādvaiśvadevena yajamānaḥ |
saṃvatsariṇāṃ svastimāsāsta ityāsāsita |
yadvaruṇapraghāsairyajate |
ādityameva tatparivatsaramāpnoti || 1 ||

[[1-4-10-3]]

vāyumeva tadanuvatsaramāpnoti |
tasmācchunāsīriyeṇa yajamānaḥ |
anuvatsariṇāṃ svastimāsāsta ityāsāsita |
saṃvatsaram vā eṣa īpsatītyāhuḥ |
yaścāturmāsyaairyajata iti |
eṣa ha tvai saṃvatsaramāpnoti |
ya evaṃ vidvāṃścāturmāsyaairyajate |
viśve devāḥ samayajanta |
te'gnimevāyajanta |
ta etaṃ lokamajayan || 3 ||

[[1-4-10-2]]

tasmādvāruṇapraghāsairyajamānaḥ |
parivatsariṇāṃ svastimāsāsta ityāsāsita |
yatsākamedhairyajate |
candramasameva tadidāvatsaramāpnoti |
tasmātsākamedhairyajamānaḥ |
idāvatsariṇāṃ svastimāsāsta ityāsāsita |
yatpitr̥yajñena yajate |
devāneva tadanvavasyati |
atha vā asya vāyuścānuvatsaraścāpṛitāvucchiṣyete |

[[3-12-9-4]]

apāno vidvānāvṛtaḥ |
pratiprātiṣṭhadadhvare |
ārtavā upagātāraḥ |
sadasyā ṛtavo'bhavan |
ardhamāsāśca māsāśca |
camasādhvaryavo'bhavan |
asāṃsadbrahmaṇastejaḥ |
acchāvāko'bhavadyaśaḥ |
ṛtameṣāṃ praśāstā'sitl |
yadvaiśvasṛja āsata || 4 ||

[[3-10-1-3]]

kāntā kāmyā kāmajātā''yuṣmati kāmadughā |
abhiśāstā'numantā''nando modaḥ pramodaḥ |
āsādayanniṣādayantsaṃsādanaḥ saṃsannaḥ sannaḥ |

ābhūrvibhūḥ prabhūḥ śaṃbhūrbhuvāḥ |
pavitraṃ pavīyīṣyanpūto medhyaḥ |
yaśo yaśasvānāyuramṛtaḥ |
jīvo jīviṣyantsvargo lokaḥ |
sahasvāntsahīyānojasvāntsahamānaḥ |
jayannabhijayantsudraviṇo draviṇodāḥ |
ārdrapavitro harikeśo modaḥ pramodaḥ || 3 ||

[[3-10-10-3]]

yo ha vai muhūrtānāṃ nāmadheyāni veda |
na muhūrteṣvārtimārcchati |
citraḥ keturdātā pradātā savitā prasavitā'bhiśāstā'numanteti |
ete'nuvākā muhūrtānāṃ nāmadheyāni |
na muhūrteṣvārtimārcchati |
ya evaṃ veda |
yo ha vā ardhmāsānāṃ ca māsānāṃ ca nāmadheyāni veda |
nārdhamāseṣu na māseṣvārtimārcchati |
pavitraṃ pavīyīṣyantsahasvāntsahīyānarūṇo'ruṇarajā iti |
ete'nuvākā ardhmāsānāṃ ca māsānāṃ ca nāmadheyāni || 3 ||

Verses from Taittiriya Samhita

[[2-6-9-7]]

devatās tā arīradhāmeti vāvaitad āha
yan na nirdīśet prativeśaṃ yajñasyāśīr gached
ā śāste 'yaṃ yajamāno 'sāv ity āha nirdīśyaivainaṃ suvargaṃ lokaṃ gamayati |
āyur ā śāste suprajāstvam ā śāsta ity āhāśīṣam evaitām ā śāste
sajātavanasyām ā śāsta ity āha prāṇā vai sajātāḥ prāṇān eva ||

[[3-1-8-3]]

prathamo 'm̐śu skandati sa īśvara indriyaṃ vīryam prajāṃ paśūn yajamānasya
nirhantos tam abhi mantrayeta |
ā māskānt saha prajāyā saha rāyas poṣeṇendriyam me vīryam mā nir vadhīs |
ity āśīṣam evaitām ā śāsta indriyasya vīryasya prajāyā paśūnām anirghātāya
drapsaś caskanda pṛthivīm anu dyām imaṃ ca yonim anu yaś ca pūrvaḥ | tṛtīyaṃ
yonim anu saṃcarantaṃ drapsaṃ juhomy anu sapta hotrāḥ ||

[[3-2-4-2]]

yajñaṃ vāva sa tad ahan tasmā eva namaskṛtya sadaḥ pra sarpaty ātmano 'nārtyai
namo rudrāya makhaghne namaskṛtyā mā pāhi |
ity āgnīdhraṃ tasmā eva namaskṛtya sadaḥ pra sarpaty ātmano 'nārtyai
nama indrāya makhaghna indriyam me vīryam mā nir vadhīs |
iti hotrīyam āśīṣam evaitām ā śāsta indriyasya vīryasyānirghātāya

[[5-7-4-4]]

uta saṃdr̥k prajāpatiḥ parameṣṭhī virājā | stomās chandāṃsi nivido ma āhur etasmai
rāṣṭram abhi saṃ namāma ||
abhyāvartadhvam upa meta sākam ayaṃ śāstādhipatir vo astu | asya vijñānam anu
saṃ rabhadhvam imam paścād anu jīvātha sarve ||
rāṣṭrabhṛta etā upa dadhāti |
eṣā vā agneś citi rāṣṭrabhṛt
tayaivāsmin rāṣṭraṃ dadhāti
rāṣṭram eva bhavati

[[6-3-8-4]]

ātānās tebhya eva namas karoti |

anarvā prehīty āha bhrātṛvyo vā arvā bhrātṛvyāpanuttyai
ghṛtasya kulyām anu saha prajāyā saha rāyas poṣeṇety āhāśīṣam evaitām ā śāstā
āpo devīḥ śuddhāyuva ity āha yathāyajur evaitat ||

Rig Veda

- 10.052.01a viśve devāḥ śāstana mā yatheha hotā vṛto manavai yan niśadya |
10.052.01c pra me brūta bhāgadheyaṃ yathā vo yena pathā havyam ā vo vahāni ||
10.052.02a ahaṃ hotā ny asīdaṃ yajīyān viśve devā maruto mā junanti |
10.052.02c ahar-ahar aśvinādhvaryavaṃ vām brahmā samid bhavati sāhutir vām ||

Further, here is the text of Aadi Shankara's Shaasta Keshaadi Paada Varnana, where one can see descriptions of various aspects of the Lord including Dharma, Kiratha Shaasta, Bhoothanaatha, Prabha Samedha and most importantly Dakshinamurthi or Guru.

AshAnurUpaphaladaM charaNAravinda-bhAjAmapArakaruNArNava pUrNa chandram |
nAshAya sarvavipadAmapi naumi nitya-mIshAnakeshavabhavaM bhuvanaikanAtham || 1
pinChAvall valayitAkalita prasUna-sanjAta kAntibhara bhAsura keshabhAram |
shinjAna manjumaNibhUShaNa ranjitANgaMchandrAvataM saharinandanamAshrayAmi || 2
AlolanllalalitALuka hAraramya-mAkamranAsamaruNAdharamAyatAkSham |
AlaMbanaM trijagatAM pramathAdhinAthaM mAnamraloka harinandanamAshrayAmi || 3
karNAvalaMbimaNikuNDala bhAsamAna gaNDasthalaM samuditAnana puNDarIkam |
arNojanAbhaharayoriva mUrtimantaM puNyAtirekamiva bhUtapatiM namAmi || 4
uddaNDachArubhujadaNDayugAgrasamsthaMkodaNDabANA mahitAntamatAntavIryam |
udyatprabhApaTaladIpramadabhrasAraM nityaM prabhApatimahaM praNato bhavAmi || 5
mAleya pa~Nkasamala~NkRRita bhAsamAna dorantarALa tarALamalahArajAlam |
nIIAtinirmala dukUladharaM mukunda-kAIAntaka pratinidhiM praNato.asmi nityam || 6
yatpAda paNkajayugaM munayo.apyUjasraM bhaktyA bhajanti bhavaroga nivAraNaya |
putraM purAntakamurAntakayorudAraM nityaM namAmyahamamitrakulAntakam tam || 7
kAntaM kaLAya kusumadyutilobhanlya-kAntipravAha vilasatkamanlya rUpam |
kAntAtanUja sahitaM nikhilAmayaugha-shAntipradaM pramathayUthapatiM namAmi || 8
bhUtesha bhUrikaruNAmRRita pUrapUrNavArAnnidhe, varada, bhaktajanaikabandho |
pAyAdbhavAn praNatamenamapAraghorasaMsArabhItamiha mAmakhilAmayebhyaH || 9
he bhUtanAtha bhagavan, bhavadIya chArupAdAMBhujebhavatu bhaktirachanchala me |
nAthAya sarvajagatAM bhajatAM bhavAbdhipotAya nityamakhilA~Ngabhuve namaste || 10
iti shrI shAstAkeshAdipAdanta varNana stotraM sampUrNam |



18 forms of Lord Shaasta in Ashtadasa Shaasta temple, Jeevakona, Tirupati

Dwaadasha Tattvas: A Digression

Related to and building upon the concept and spiritual significance of Lord Shaasta in Sri Vidya, here is introducing the concept of "Dwaadasha Tattva" or concepts commonly visualized as 12 key deities in Hinduism, retaining the core essence of Shanmatha. We must note here that the 'deities' are abstract concepts, transcendent of space (they are universal) and time (they have existence in past, present and future). Thus, as much as this collection depicts the stages during the original creation or the ultimate destruction, this exact same collection also shows the mechanism of the universe, this very moment. These deities are all to be viewed as different

names or forms of the one Absolute, without any distinction of superior or inferior. For this reason, one must look at aspects of Spirituality dating back to an age far before the intellectual degradation and the assault of petty egotism that drives people mad claiming superiority of Shaivism, Vaishnavism etc, without understanding even the extent of philosophical depth in Indian Spirituality. Even during Aadi Shankara's times, such nefarious squabbles were prevalent. So ultimately, we are pushed to the ancient Sangam and Vedic ages to seek some sensible, valid points for understanding the Dwaadasha Tattva.



The basic premise is the premise of Advaita, ie. the body, mind, world and everything understood by the five senses, thoughts, feelings and memories is unreal, figments of the mind and is the delusion called Maaya, revolving around a false sense of identification with the finite body and mind, also called Ego or Ahankaara. Transcending this Maaya, one kills the Ahankaara and the unreal 'world' to reveal the true Self (Atman), which is infinite, eternal truth (Sat), fundamental consciousness (Chit) and pure unalloyed bliss (Anandam). This Self is very much the Absolute, Parabrahman, which gives rise to the entire universe through its 'playful act'

of Maaya, and thus as the playful source, is called 'Lalitha Ambika', the Universal Mother. Because the Mother is beyond form, descriptions and intellectual comprehension, She is termed 'Nirguna'.

Lalitha Ambika is nothing but the Aanandam or Atman itself, as the ultimate destination in all of Spirituality. This is the "**Zeroth Tattva**".

Then comes the triad of Shiva-Shakti-Maayon, discussed in detail earlier. Similarly, Dharma Shaasta, in between Nirguna and Saguna stages is the "**First Tattva**", while Shiva, Shakti and Maayon are "**Second, Third and Fourth Tattvas**".

Combining the realm of Maayon, and Shiva and Shakti yields what is called the Kaamakalaa - Localized within Saguna level, this has aspects of Maayon, Shiva and Shakti as local Reality (Maaya), local existence (Ahankaara) and local identity (Naama Roopa). This Kaamakalaa is the primordial localized wisdom or awareness (Jnaana) and takes on two forms. Looking inwards, this is static, and represents the first case of matter. It is thus called the seed Bindu, or Skanda - as the pure embodiment of Jnaana directed towards the Atman (Guru Guha). Turned outwards, this is the first case of energy, and is the primordial vibration, or Naada, known as Vinaayaka or Ganesha. This inward and outward perception together gives the first and primordial wave, better known as Aum, or Pranava or Omkaara. Both are inward and outward aspects of Kaamakalaa, and thus Skanda and Vinaayaka form the "**Fifth and Sixth Tattvas**".



From the Naada-Bindu duo, the wave Aum develops three flavors, called three Gunas. These are represented by three 'Shakti Devis'. The first, is the power of Will or Iccha Shakti, seen as Goddess Lakshmi. Better known to physics as potential energy, this represents the built up urge and impetus to perform any given action. Within the realm of expansion, it is this Lakshmi, also called Narayani or Vaishnavi that transforms into Bhuvaneshwari, with the full expanse of the universe forming Her very own body. Thus, the concept of 'space' is born. The second Shakti

Devi is Work or Kriya Shakti, seen as Goddess Durga. Sporting weapons of all deities, She is to be understood wherever some action or work is done. Known in physics as Kinetic Energy, work is essentially to bring about changes in the state of a system, also known by the concept of entropy. Due to such changes, we understand something as an initial or final state, and thus the concept of 'time' is born as a marker of the state change. Thus, Durga transforms into Kaali, represented as dark and embodiment of death and destruction, since work done is always at the expense of energy, leading to decrease in energy level. The last Shakti Devi is Wisdom or Jnaana Shakti, seen as Goddess Saraswathi. Known in physics as information energy, or state space, the Goddess represents the complete yet highly localized state of awareness and information of an entity with respect to its surroundings and energy states.



These three deities - Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi are all transcendent of the Gunas, yet rule over the three Gunas of Taamasa, Raajasa and Sattva respectively due to the tendency to expend, increase or consolidate the energy level. These deities form the "**Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Tattvas**".

With the three flavors of Iccha, Jnaana and Kriya, this Aum now spreads, permeating and pervading the entire universe, within the bounds of space and time. These coordinate systems of space and time, containing the Aum, is seen as the deity Brahma, which is the creator God. This is the "**Tenth Tattva**".

Within the coordinates of Brahma, the universe starts to materialize. The infiniteness of the coordinates is translated as not (A) finite (Diti) - Aditi, and thus, the universe born out of Aditi is called Aaditya. Among all aspects of the manifest universe, life is seen as the most precious and most valuable, and thus Aaditya is associated with life itself (Jeeva). Locally, for the planet earth, the sun Soorya is the ultimate source of all life, and is thus seen as equivalent with Aaditya. Thus, the deity Aaditya forms the "**Eleventh Tattva**".



Finally, within the manifest universe, and even within earth, as the living embodiment of all the previous 11 Tattvas, we find the deity Hanuman. The Lord is a Shiva-Shakti incarnation, attained Narayana through Bhakti, is the embodiment of wisdom (Buddhir Balam) as Vinaayaka and Skanda, and represents the triple Shaktis as Knowledge-Wealth-Valour (Kalvi, Selvam, Veeram). As the Shishya (disciple) of Aaditya, the Lord is Guru Himself (Dharma Shasta), and embodies the concept of life itself, living to eternity without death as a Chiranjeevi. Combining all these aspects, the Lord Hanuman, as an embodiment of Nirguna Lalitha Ambika Herself stands as an epitome of Bhakti, or divine love, or devotion, which is the one and only thing a person on earth needs to start the upward journey towards Self-Realization. Thus, Hanuman is the last and "**Twelfth Tattva**".

Thus, these 12 Tattvas, are seen without hierarchical limitations of superior-inferior as manifestations of Lalitha Ambika in various fundamental aspects of the creation, destruction and operation of the universe, and are the key 12 deities to be worshipped and contemplated both while and after journeying towards Self-Realization or Moksha.

One can understand the universe, its creation and mechanism substantially, from the perspective of Self-Realization and the esoteric Sri Vidya tradition, by looking at a set of 12 concepts, called Dwadasha Tattvas, which contain 12 of the most worshipped deities of Hinduism.

But, any discussion on Sri Vidya has to necessarily revolve around the Sri Yantra, a cosmic geometric pattern of interlocking triangles that is in other words, a map of the entire universe. This pattern can be best understood as the nine Avaranas, a series of 9 enclosures, each inner enclosure more subtle than the outer ones. There are many Avarana Devas residing in each of the Avaranas, as well as 9 Yogini Devas for the nine Avaranas. However, the names of these Enclosures themselves best symbolize what they represent, as well as the effects of worshipping them.



One sees a correspondence between the 9 Avaranas and the 12 Concepts, as follows. The order is from the innermost Avarana to outermost, called Srishti Krama.

1. Sarva Aananda Maya Chakra: This is the ninth Avarana, and is the Bindu, or the innermost point of Sri Yantra. Resident here is the Universal Mother Herself, Lalitha Ambika. She is the Nirguna Parabrahman, as the Atman (Self) itself, transcendent of illusive Maya, and is Sat-Chit-Aananda. Also resident in this Avarana is the Guru or Preceptor, who is non-different from the Atman itself, guiding one towards Self-Realization, encompassing the paths of Jnaana and Bhakti. Lord Shaasta, whose name itself translates as "Master", is glorified in Yajur Veda as "Sarva Atma", while Lalitha Sahasranaama calls the Mother "Sarvaan Ullanghya Shaasana". Lord Shaasta the Guru Tattva, as well as Lalitha Ambika, the Atma Tattva are thus resident in this innermost Avarana.

2. Sarva Siddhi Prada Chakra: The eighth Avarana, is the central triangle surrounding the Bindu. Resident here are three Avarana Devatas representing Avyakta, Mahat and Ahankaara. These are 3 levels of manifestation such as pure existence, glory and ego. This represents the original Nirguna Atma manifesting as an individual with qualities as Saguna. This is only possible through Maaya. Thus, resident in this Avarana are three Tattvas - Narayana Tattva or Maayon, who rules over Maya, Shiva Tattva which is pure existence and Shakti Tattva, which are attributes. Shiva-Shakti-Maayon are inseparable and form the Tattvas of the eighth Avarana.

3. Sarva Rogahara Chakra: This is the seventh Avarana, and consists of eight triangles representing 8 Devatas known as Vaak Devatas, deities of speech. These 8 actually represent global qualities like pleasure, pain, heat, cold, that define a particular point in space and time. These are states of awareness, brought by the union of Shiva, Shakti and Maayon, as the seed or Bindu. This Bindu is called Skanda, and represents pure Jnaana or wisdom, turned inward towards the Self. Thus, Subrahmanya, also known as Vaakpati, is Skanda Tattva resident in this Avarana.

4. Sarva Rakshakara Chakra: This is the sixth Avarana having 10 triangles representing ten Agni-Shaktis. These are various aspects of the heat caused due to vibrations, which form

necessary conditions for life to manifest. In other words, when the static Bindu called Skanda assumes a dynamic form, it becomes Naada or vibration. This is the primordial vibration Aum, which is the same pure Jnaana, but turned outwards. This Aum, called Pranava, meaning giving rise to Praana (Breath), is the Lord Vinaayaka or Ganesha. Aum further gives rise to 51 different kinds of vibrations, known as the 51 Aksharas. Thus, Vinaayaka Tattva is the resident of this Avarana.

5. Sarva Artha Sadhaka Chakra: This Avarana also contains 10 triangles denoting 10 Praana Shaktis - or the 10 aspects of the vital life force, that we popularly call breath. Arising directly out of the dynamic Pranava, Praana is the most direct manifestation of the pure Jnaana in the body. This is by breath control, or Praanaayama is recommended as one of the 8 limbs of Ashtaanga Yoga, to journey towards Self-Realization. Thus, Goddess Saraswathi, symbolizing Jnaana Shakti Tattva is resident in this fifth Avarana.

6. Sarva Saubhagya Dayaka Chakra: This Avarana has 14 triangles denoting 14 universes, as well as 14 important Naadis or energy channels. The Praana generated in the previous Avarana flows through these Nadis, and thus these form the energy circulatory system of the body. The result is that it ensures complete and balanced flow of Praana to all areas, ensuring that no deficiency arises in any aspect of functioning. Thus, all auspiciousness, or Saubhagya is ensured. Additionally, it forms the impetus for Praana to do various kinds of activities in various regions of the body. Thus, as the activity inducing aspect, Goddess Lakshmi or Iccha Shakti Tattva is resident in this Avarana.

7. Sarva Samkshobhana Chakra: This Avarana has 8 petals, symbolizing the 8 Ananga Shaktis. These are various activities such as respiration, digestion, moving, grasping and so on. The pure Jnaana as Praana, with the impetus of Iccha now performs various activities, called Kriya to sustain the life. Thus, the Goddess Durga, as Kriya Shakti Tattva is resident in this third Avarana.

8. Sarva Aasha Paripooraka Chakra: This Avarana has 16 petals, and represent the Akarshana Shaktis, or controller of various aspects such as the five elements - Pancha Bhootas, five sense organs, five action organs etc. In other words, this Avarana represents the Kaarya-Kaarana or Cause and Effect principle, where, the Akarshana Shaktis are seen as Kaaranas for various Kaaryas. The Sun God Aaditya is praised as Kaarya-Kaarana Aatmaka. However, Aaditya is born of Aditi, translated as "Infiniteness" or Expansiveness. This expansive nature is viewed as Lord Brahma, who represents the coordinates of space and time extending till infinity. Aaditya represents the universe or matter that is contained within this infinite space-time. As Einstein's relativity says, space-time tells matter how to move and matter tells space-time how to curve. Thus, Coordinates Aditi and Universe Aaditya are intimately connected, and as both these aspects, Lord Brahma and Lord Aaditya are resident in this second Avarana.

9. Trailokya Mohana Chakra: As the first Avarana, this contains of three concentric rings, known as Bhoopura. The Avarana Devatas are the 10 Siddhis or Powers, 8 Maatrukas denoting various Shaktis, and 10 Mudras or perspectives. Together, these denote various emotions and afflictions that must be overcome to journey spiritually. Lord Aanjaneya or Hanuman is a Sarva-Shakti Svaroop, blessed with all the Siddhis and combining within Him the powers of all Maatrukas. The Lord represents the epitome of Bhakti, where He channelises all the emotions and afflictions into positive direction as Bhakti, enabling the Spiritual Journey forward towards

Self-Realization. Thus Lord Aanjaneya as Bhakti Tattva is resident in this first and outermost Avarana of the Sri Yantra.

The 12 concepts correspond also with the 9 planets (Navagrahas) and are to be worshipped accordingly: Concept of Sun or Soorya (Aaditya), Prakasha-Vimarsha for Moon Chandra (Shiva-Shakti), Skanda for Tuesday - Angaaraka, Vishnu for Budha or Wednesday, Guru Shasta or Saraswathi as Wisdom for Thursday Brihaspathi, Lakshmi or Lalitha Ambika for Friday Shukra, Aanjaneya for Shani Saturday, Durga for Raahu and Vinayaka for Kethu.

Thus, worshipping sincerely the 12 concepts everyday ensures the worship of the 9 Avaranas of the Sri Yantra. These Avaranas offer the most complete picture of creation and mechanism of the entire universe in all its aspects.

Evolution of the Shaasta Concept

Taking the Yajur Vedic reference of the term 'Shaasta' to be the earliest one, one observes the following:

1. Shaasta is seen as the Self or Atman itself, as the soul, and thus as non-different from the Absolute Parabrahman.
2. Shaasta translates to teacher, or master, and as the Guru, represents transcending from Saguna to Nirguna through Jnaana and wisdom, along with Bhakti.
3. Shaasta is seen worshipped along with Indra, Varuna, Vaayu, Agni etc, as well as Rudra, Vishnu etc. As much as these deities correspond to external worship, of elements of nature, Shaasta corresponds to internal worship, as the Self.
4. Since the spiritual journey is always outside to inside, Shaasta is seen as superior and as overlord to all the deities. Since the elements of nature such as Agni, Vaayu and Varuna are called Bhoothas, Shaasta becomes the Bhoothanaatha.

Thus, from this reference, in the context of spiritual perspective such as the Dwaadasha Tattvas, the journey from the mundane birth and death of Samsaara to Moksha is visualized, and the various deities are seen as aspects of Parabrahman that fit in various levels and roles in this perspective. In this context, Shaasta is seen at the very highest level, as Guru, and non distinct from Parabrahman itself, in Nirguna form.

As time evolved, worship transformed from purely nature, animistic oriented, to stone based worship and temples. Here, the spiritual perspective branched and took two broad forms - Aagamic and Dharmic.

The Aagamic Shaasta

Even though a human being's ultimate aim and objective or Purushaartha is liberation or Moksha, it is a well known fact that very few are in their last births, in the direct path or close proximity to this goal, even among the brahmins, whose primarily ordained duties were to engage in spiritual pursuit and research of the Absolute.

Thus, with a view to catering to the general public, while not compromising too much on the Purushaartha of Moksha, temples were constructed. Rather than holding the pure Advaitic view involving Nirguna Parabrahman, which is little hard to conceptualize, temples focused on a certain deity such as Shiva or Vishnu, and regarded this deity as Parabrahman. So too, other aspects of the spiritual perspective were modified accordingly, and these gave rise to the concept of Aagamas.

In such Aagama based constructions, deviations were seen from the spiritual perspective. The Guru was no longer seen at the center of everything, but rather as one of many deities involving many of the aspects in the spiritual perspective. This did not necessarily demean the importance of Guru but meant a different arrangement in temples, focusing on the central deity, the choice of which lead to different types of Aagamas.

1. Shaiva Aagamas centered around Lord Shiva, represented typically in Lingam form, and highlighting the Shiva or Prakaasha aspect of PARabrahman along with Vimarsha aspect as Shakti. There are 28 Shaiva Aagamas, most famous of which is the Kaamika, and in most of them, Shaasta the Guru is also seen as an aspect of Shiva, as Dakshinamurthi.
2. Shaakta Aagamas centered around Shakti, either giving or not giving equal importance to Shiva. There are 64 of these, typically called the 64 Tantras, and all center on the Universal Mother, who is also seen as the Guru Shaasta. However, it is said that the one tradition far more superior and powerful than all the 64 Tantras is Sri Vidya, viewing the Universal Mother as Lalitha Ambika, and the only temple constructed meticulously in this tradition is the Kamalaamba temple of Thiruvarur. In this temple, one sees Lord Shaasta as-is, in the rightful place of Guru, as an aspect of the Mother itself, as seen earlier.
3. Vaishnava Aagamas centered around Lord Narayana, and are generally classified into Vaikhanasa and Pancharatra Aagamas. The primary theme of these Aagamas is Bhakti, and temples constructed as per these texts center on Lord Vishnu in standing, reclining or sitting postures, and Shaasta the Guru is seen as Lord Krishna, the Jagadguru.

Thus, one sees various forms of Lord Shaasta as Guru, such as Dakshinamurthi or Krishna in these Aagama based temples, although in none of these the Guru is given a central place.

The Dharmic Shaasta

While Aagama based temples were indeed designed for the general public, the officiating priests were entirely brahmins, and either as a result of voluntary profession based caste or imposed birth based caste system and caste segregation, these temples were not seen as entirely conducive for other castes such as the warrior Kshatriya, trading Vaishya or artisan Shudra castes.

By sheer virtue of profession, brahmins were seen as closest to Moksha, whereas other castes, by their nature of work gave importance to the other 3 of the four Purushaarthas - Dharma, Artha and Kaama.

Among these, it was well known that Artha (Strategy) or Kaama (Fulfillment) would last long and be valuable or worthwhile only when obtained adhering to Dharma (Righteousness). Thus, Dharma came to be viewed as the main objective of life for the non-brahmin castes.

Accordingly, the temples established by these classes centered on Dharma, and viewed all deities as establishing and upholding righteousness, protecting the people from evil spirits, ghosts and calamities, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked,

Thus, the deities installed in such Dharmic temples were retained from the original spiritual perspective, except that they were worshipped in forms punishing or slaying the evil. Thus,

1. Shiva is portrayed in His aspect as Rudra the destroyer and punisher, enshrined in popular forms as Bhairava, Veerabhadra, Muneeshwara.
2. Shakti is portrayed in a much more fierce and punishing form as Chandi Kaali or Pidaari, as well as the deluding Mahamaya as Maariyamman.
3. Durga is portrayed as Kathayee or Katyayini, blessing the righteous and slaying the evil.
4. Lakshmi is portrayed as Jyeshtha or Alakshmi, Goddess of Misfortune.
5. Saraswathi dons the fierce form of Pechi, Yakshi or Isakki, paralyzing the victim.
6. Hanuman and Subrahmanya are seen in their war or Veera forms.
7. Vishnu is seen as Narasimha or as Kalki, where He takes the fierce form of Karuppaswami, with a sword and roaming around the villages astride a horse, punishing the wicked.

As head of all these deities is the Dharmic form of the Guru who is at the head of the original Spiritual Perspective. This is the birth of the concept of Dharmic Shaasta or Dharma Shaasta - where the Lord is seen as the upholder of Dharma, presiding over the other deities, and meting out rewards and punishments along with protecting the people - all these aspects of his descent from Nirguna to Saguna.

It is in this form that Dharma Shaasta is respectfully addressed as 'Ayyan' - root of the words Ayyappan and Ayyanaar. The Lord is enshrined thus, with a horse mount, with the other deities, in every town, every village, in its borders, guarding the residences as Kaaval Deivam, upholding Dharma, and forming the Kula Deivam or family deity of every family within the village.



The Ayyan Parivaaram, or entourage of the Lord includes Shiva-Rudra, Shakti-Kaali and Vishnu blessing from above, Ganesha, Karuppaswami and Skanda leading in front, Veerabhadra with the sword, Sheetala or Maariyamman with the winnow, Bhairava, the wives Purna-Pushkala, and Isakki or Pechi Amman.

Sometimes, in addition to a Guru in Aagamic temples, one sees some of the Dharmic deities installed inside the temples along with Aiyanaar. However, by and large, the perception of Shaasta as the Atman or Guru fell into the background with Aagamic temple worship gaining prominence over multiple years, with the deity more famous as the Kula-Kaaval Deivam of Ayyanaar, to the point that today, the Lord is purely seen in this context by the majority of people.

However, from careful study of the history, evolution, Puraanic and Vedic aspects of the Lord, as in the previous discussions, it is clear that Lord Shaasta has a prominence and significance much more than the family deity of Aiyanaar, and irrespective of which deity the worship is centered on, Shaasta belongs to the highest level of spiritual significance as the Guru, and thus is Parabrahman as the Atman itself. It is at this level that the Vedas address and extol the deity, earning Him the name Vipra Poojya or worshipped by the Vedas.

Conclusion

After discussing in reasonable detail the spiritual significance and symbolism of the concept of Lord Dharma Shaasta, the evolution of the concept through history into various present day forms are examined, giving a hint as to why a concept enshrined originally in the Yajur Veda has over the years become a concept shrouded in mystery and mysticism, with a complete understanding of the spiritual significance almost non-existent in present day scenario.

Dikshitar has extolled the Shaasta of Sabarimala in the Sri Vidya aspect through the weighty composition in the lovelorn Vasantha Raagam.

हरि हर पुत्रं शास्तारं सदा भजेऽहं माया कार्यं त्यजेऽहम्

मुर हरादि मोहित शौरि गिरि विहारं मुरळी भेरी वाद्यादि प्रिय-करं

प्रार्थित पुत्र प्रदं वसन्त नत बृन्दं दीर्घायुःप्रदं दीन जन फल प्रदम्

फाल्गुन मास पौर्णिमावतारं पाण्ड्य केरळादि देश प्रभा-करं

पुष्प शरेक्षु कार्मुक धरं फुल्ल कल्हार दण्ड धर करं

कलि युग प्रत्यक्षं गर्वित दक्ष शिक्षं वर गुरु गुहान्तरङ्गं रथ गज तुरङ्गम्

In the opening lines itself, Dikshitar stresses on the necessity to constantly extol the Lord and abandon all the imagined and unreal affairs of Maya (delusion).

“hariharaputraM SAstAraM sadAbhajE(a)haM mAyAkAryaM tyajE(a)ham”

Praising the Lord as resident in Sabarimala (Shauri Giri), praised by Vishnu and others, the Lord relishes music from the flute (Murali), drum (Bheri) and others. Beneficial in progeny and begetting children (Putra Pradam), and longevity (Deerghaayuh), the Lord is worshipped by hordes of people in the spring, and graces the needy and destitute (Deena Jana).

“mura harAdi mOhita Sauri giri vihAraM muraLI bhEri vAdyAdi priya-karaM prArthita putrapradaM vasantanatabRndaM dIrghAyuHpradaM dInajana phala pradam”

The aspect of Lord Shaasta as Putra Prada is in accordance with the Lord as Guru Dakshinamurthi, since, among the nine planets, Guru or Brihaspathi (Jupiter) is the Putra Kaaraka, and furthermore according to Shaasta Mahaatmyam, it was Lord Shaasta who emerged with the Prasaada at the end of King Dasharatha's Putra Kaameshti Yajna in prayer to beget Lord Raama.



Appearing in the full moon of the Phaalguna month (Phaalguna Maasa Pournima), the Lord shines (Prabhaakara) in south Tamilnadu (Paandya) and Kerala lands.

“phAlguna mAsa paurNimAvatAraM pANDya kEraLAdi dESa prabhA-karaM”

The Lord as Sri Vidya Shaasta is praised as non-different from Lalitha Ambika, where He is seen holding the main weapons of the Mother - the flowery arrows and the bow of sugarcane (Pushpa Shara Ekshu Kaarmuka). Worshipped with the Senkzhuneer flower (Phulla Kalhaara), the Lord holds a staff (Dandam).

“pushpa SarEkshu kArmuka dharaM phulla kalhAra daNDa dhara karaM”

The form (Pratyaksha) for the Kali Yuga, the Lord is seen as non-different from Rudra, in punishing the arrogant Daksha (Daksha Shiksham). The Lord is seen as the inner principle of Guruguha, and rides on chariots of elephants and horses.

**“kali yuga pratyakshaM garvita daksha SikshaM
vara guru guhAntarangaM ratha gaja turangam”**

This song clearly establishes the concept of Sri Vidya Shaasta, and the equivalence with Lalitha Ambika.

The ultimate destination revered in all of Indian Spirituality is Moksha or Self-Realization, and this necessarily involves transcending of Maaya by an individual, killing the ego and journeying towards the Nirguna. Then, by sheer common sense, the preceptor guiding the individual through Self-Realization must necessarily be an entity that has already transcended Maaya. This condition is only satisfied in two ways.

1. The Nirguna, as the Mother Lalitha Ambika Herself must be the preceptor. This has been the case in Lord Krishna, who is non-different from the Mother as Sri Vidya Raajagopaala, and gave the world the supreme message in Bhagavad Gita.
2. The Saguna-Nirguna, or Lord Dharma Shaasta, who has transcended Saguna as the Guru aspect and embodies aspects of both Saguna and Nirguna. Apart from the Mother Herself, it is this Lord alone that can guide a person towards Moksha. Thus, He is the Atman itself as the eternal Guru Shaasta as well as upholder of Dharma, embodying both paths of Jnaana and Bhakti.

Thus, Lord Shaasta as the Yajur Vedic Sarva-Aatma is Lalitha Ambika Herself, the SatChitAanandam Parabrahman. Ultimate Testimony to this fact is the 995th name of Lalitha Sahasranaamam - “Sarvaan Ullanghya Shaasana” - Supreme One whose orders can never be disobeyed. This Naama addresses the Universal Mother Lalitha Ambika as ‘Shaasana’, the same root of the word ‘Shaasta’. So too, in Keezhkulam, Udayagiri of Kanyakumari, one finds a temple of Sastha Rajarajeshwari.



In Conclusion, Bowing down in total surrender to Lord Dharma Shaasta, the infinite ocean of compassion, all one can say is “Swamiye Sharanam Ayyappa!”

Courtesy

Photos Courtesy: Dinamalar Temples <http://temple.dinamalar.com/>.

Shanmatha Sastha Blogspot <http://shanmatha.blogspot.in/>.

Google Images for various images and postures of Lord Shaasta

Wikipedia for details on Manikanta incarnation and other important facts.

The author highlights a very special courtesy to Shri. Aravind Subramaniam the “Paraaya Gupthan” of Shanmatha Sastha Blogspot, for his relentless research in compiling various facets of Lord Shaasta, which has been the basis for multiple parts of the present article.

Swamiye Sharanam Ayyappa!

[Om Sri Sai Venkateshaya Namah]