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## Sangeeta Sthalam-s - 6 Heritage Landmarks in Music

### Tiruvottriyur

If there is a sthalam in and around Chennai that can claim to be truly ancient, it is Tiruvottriyur. The very kshetra name-- Adipuri, testifies to its age. The name Ottriyur is said to have come about because of the fact that its exalted status ensured that it was exempt from taxes (*variylirundu otri vaikka pattu--* in Tamil) during ancient times. Located beyond Royapuram, Tiruvottriyur till recently had all the hallmarks of a peaceful village. But now it has changed beyond all recognition and has rapidly been absorbed in ever growing Chennai.

Locating the temple is not all that easy....

#### The entrance to the temple



The temple proper is an imposing one, with a high wall topped by a single gopuram of five levels. A unique aspect that strikes one on entering the temple is that the dhwaja stambham and the main sanctum are not aligned to the gopuram and are towards its left....

At the outer periphery, aligned with the wall, is a series of shrines for many Sivalinga-s. Thus one sees the sahasralinga (in reality 1000 linga-s carved on one stone), Jwaradevar, a Sivalinga for each of the 27 nakshatra-s and an enormous akasa linga that is true to name, open to the skies. The sthala vriksha which is the Athi tree is also here....

...The temple has a history of verse and music that goes back many centuries. A Pallava king Kadavar Kon of the 6th century composed on the Lord here and his songs form part of the eleventh Tirumurai. Tirugnanasambandar and Appar among the Nayanmar-s have composed verses in praise of this deity....

The *Tripurasundari Ashtakam* of Adi Sankara is said to have been composed at this shrine. In terms of music, it is however the Tiruvottriyur Pancharatnam-s of Tyagaraja that come immediately to mind at this sanctum. All five songs are dedicated to this Goddess....

Hideous grille gates, lavish use of plastic emulsion on the walls and in many places cladding with polished granite have ruined what was once a heritage area.

As for music, it might appear to be far removed from these surroundings. But happily that is not so. Some chaste nagaswara music is played over the public address system both in the morning and evening. The evening I visited the place, I was treated to *Kamalambam bhajare*, *Ra ra ma intidaka* and a brief alapana of Kuranji raga. A faint and tenuous link with the musical past is being maintained and let us hope it will be strengthened with time.

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