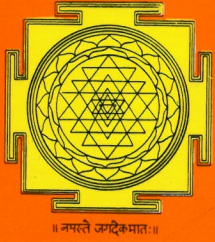


A PROJECT ON BHARATIYA-SAMSKRITI-SARVASVA-KOSHA



Kalpatharu Research Academy Publication

Chief Editor : DAIVAJNA K.N. SOMAYAJI

INDIAN TEMPLE TRADITIONS



By

S.K. RAMACHANDRA RAO

KALPATHARU RESEARCH ACADEMY

(A DIVISION OF SRI SRINGERI SHARADA PEETHAM)

NO. 37, SHANKARA PARK, SHANKARAPURAM,

BANGALORE - 560 004.

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॥ श्री शृङ्गेरी श्रीजगद्गुरुमहासंस्थानम् ॥

श्रीमत्परमहंसपरिव्राजकाचार्यवर्य पदवाक्यप्रमाणपारावारपारीण
यमनियमासनप्रणायामप्रत्याहारध्यानाध्यानसमाध्यष्टाङ्गयोगानुष्ठाननिष्ठ
तपश्चक्रवर्त्यनाद्यविच्छिन्न श्रीशङ्कराचार्यगुरुपरम्पराप्राप्त षड्दर्शनस्थापनाचार्य
व्याख्यानसिंहासनाधीश्वर सकलनिगमागमसारहृदय सांख्यत्रयप्रतिपादक वैदिकमार्गप्रवर्तक
सर्वतन्त्रस्वतन्त्रादिराजधानी विद्यानगरमहाराजधानी कर्णाटकसिंहासनप्रतिष्ठापनाचार्य
श्रीमद्राजाधिराजगुरुभूमण्डलाचार्य ऋष्यशृङ्गपुरवराधीश्वर तुङ्गभद्रातीरवासि
श्रीमद्विद्याशङ्करपादपद्माराधक श्रीजगद्गुरु श्रीमदभिनवविद्यातीर्थस्वामिगुरुकरकमलसञ्जात

॥ श्री जगद्गुरु शृङ्गेरी श्रीमद्भारतीतीर्थमहास्वामिभिः ॥

अस्मदत्यन्तप्रियशिष्य श्री नरसिंह सोमयाजि विषये नारायणस्मरणपूर्वकं विरचिता
आशिषस्समुल्लसन्तु ।

वैदिकान्वयाये लब्धजनिर्भवान् ज्योतिर्विद्यामभ्यस्य तद्द्वारा बहून् जनान् उपकुर्वन्नास्ते । वेदागमशास्त्रेषु
भूयसीं श्रद्धामावहन् तत्प्रचाराय कल्पतरु संशोधनप्रतिष्ठान नाम्नीं संस्थां प्रत्यस्थापयत् । सा च संस्था
विशिष्टान् ग्रन्थान् प्रकाशयन्ती वरीवर्ति ।

शृंगेरि जगद्गुरु महासंस्थाने पारम्परिकीं भक्तिमास्थितवतो भवतो मनसि संस्थामेनां शृंगेरि मठीयां
विधातुं सङ्कल्पः उदभूदिति विज्ञाय मोदामहे । अत एव अदसीयानि प्रकाशनानि इतः परं मठीयत्वेनैव
प्रकाशयिष्यन्त इत्यपि भवान् निरचिनोत् । दुर्लभाः भारतीयसंस्कृतिप्रबोधकाः विशिष्टाः ग्रन्थाः
संस्थायानया प्रकाशयन्तां तेन च भवदीयो मनोरथः फलेग्रहिर्भूयात् श्रीशारदाचन्द्रमौलीश्वरयोरनुकम्पया
भवान् इतोधिकं श्रेयः परम्पराभिः समभिवर्धतामिति चाशास्महे ।

शृङ्गेरिः

ईश्वर भाद्रपदशुद्धदशमी भार्गवासरः

१२.८.१९८७

इति नारायणस्मरणम्

PREFACE

The Kalpatharu Research Academy, Bangalore, has taken it as its mission to focus the attention of the Scholarly world the elite as well as the interested lay-folk, here and abroad. On all the significant aspects of Indian Culture. It has made a mark in the Publication World by its numerous volumes, which have been received exceedingly well by readers, students and reviewers. The volumes pertain to Temple Culture, devotional themes, Vedic ritual and related topics. Now and there significant volume is brought out relating to Temple Culture.

The Publication, which is the Fifty-Seventh in the series, is a comprehensive and illustrated account of the Indian Temple in all aspects: Architecture, Sculpture, Symbolism worship and festivals. It highlights the essential aspects of the Temple Tradition.

The Academy has launched on an elaborate ambitious but important programme of bringing out a series of Encyclopaedic volumes concerning all aspects of Indian Culture: Bharatiya-Sanskriti-Sarvasva-Kosha: simultaneously, a series of volumes on the Indian divinities (Devata-Kosha) is also being brought out. Besides the earlier volumes on Ganesha, Lalita, Nava-Graha and Salagrama-Kosha and recently Durga-Kosha has been Published.

A third series, undertaken by the Academy is concerning the Vedas, Under the Veda Darshana Project. The Veda Darshana Project. The first volume on Rig-Veda will be released before the end of this year.

The Academy, acknowledges the help rendered by Prof. S.K. Ramachandra Rao who has kindly prepared this volume, and its deep gratitude to the Authorities of Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development, Govt. of India, New Delhi and Department of Education, Govt. of Karnataka, for the generous support for this noble task and Sri D. Veerendra Heggade, Dharmastala Temple, Dakshina Kannada, and to the Omkar Offset Printers, Bangalore, who have promptly and elegantly printed this volume.

Bangalore
11th October 1997
Vijaya Dashami

DAIVAJNA K.N. SOMAYAJI
CHIEF EDITOR AND DIRECTOR
KALPATHARU RESEARCH ACADEMY

KALPATHARU RESEARCH ACADEMY

INSTITUTION FOR :

- * Promotion of Research-Oriented studies in Veda, Vedanga, Agama, Jyoutisha, Vedanta, Yoga and Ayurveda.
- * Study of Sanskrit language in particular and other related languages.
- * Propagation of Vedic Phonetics.
- * Establishment of Veda Patashalas in Guru-Kula system.
- * Running of Oriental Libraries (Prachya-Granthalaya).
- * Collection, Preservation and Publication of Old Manuscripts.

INTRODUCTION

Several hundreds of Books on Indian Temples have appeared till today; and there seems to be scope of more books. There have been books dealing with Art and Architecture of Indian Temples, religious and historical aspects of Temples Legends and Myths concerning them, social significance and economic implications of Temple Organization. Very few Books, however, set out to recognize even the existence of a tradition in relation to Building, Consecrating and worshipping in a Temple. The present volume is modest attempt to delineate the traditional approach to subject of Temples.

There has been a general tendency to ignore the textual prescriptions and traditional accounts while dealing with the Temples, and concentrate only the existing structures and conditions, that are prevalent. And while treating of individual Temples, the general idea of a Temple as a cultural detail is lost sight of. The present attempt to correct this error. The wood must not be missed for the trees.

I am grateful to Daivajna K.N. Somayaji, Director of Kalpatharu Research Academy, Bangalore, for the opportunity provided for me to write this volume, and to my friend Babu of Omkar Offset Printers for the courtesy shown to me while this Book was under print.

S.K. RAMACHANDRA RAO

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नमस्ते जगदेक मातः



H.H. Sri Sri BHARATI THEERTA MAHASWAMIJI
HUMBLE DEDICATION TO OUR CHIEF PATRON

CHAPTER I

THE HUMAN NEED FOR SHRINES

Man is in many respects a unique animal : he can create culture as no other animal can. This he does, not only to satisfy an impulse of fancy, but in order that he may survive. Culture guards him against the present and also the possible shocks and stresses; and affords meaning to his otherwise meaningless, mechanical and animal existence. As an aspect of this culture, he creates images in his mind for reverence and worship, and fashions icons by his hands which are enjoyable and usable. The former represents religion, and the latter art. Man has been an image-creator and an icon-fashioner throughout his career on earth for

over a million years. And, therefore, religion and art have always been with him. The temple represents a combination of religion and art; and its roots go back to a very remote past, in fact to the earliest stages of his career on earth. Ever since man became a homo sapiens, he has also been homo religious. And he has built temples of some sort and worshipped in them in some manner since that time.

Man needs religion. He needs it in order to secure himself from challenges from nature and from his fellow-beings. Religion is in reality an adjustment for stresses and uncertainties in life: anxieties about

an as yet obscure future and irritations from present ills. There is perhaps no doubt about fear being the imminent source of religion; it is still the mainstay of religion the world over. The argument that religion is a method of adapting to the mysteries that loom large in life as well as in nature is not to be brushed aside lightly. But man's life in the world is not guided solely by negative impulses. Man has also a capacity to wonder, to be struck by beauty and impressed by sublimity. And this has played no mean part in the development of religion.

Further, there is a tendency, almost inherent in man, to transcendence, to reach out into the unseen and the as-yet-unactualized. This capacity for transcendence

combined with the ability to wonder is basic to religion as well as art. This is a necessary involvement in the idea of the 'Holy'. In the various expressions of religion such as rituals, ceremonials, shrines, magical cults and worship paraphernalia, art is thus necessarily included. The images and the icons go together.

The image-making tendency representing religion discovered early in his career and projected a hidden but real power in the world around. The more uncanny the mysterious the aspect of nature, the greater was the possibility of the presence of this power. A high mountain, the rugged peak, a deep gorge, forest fastness, or the source of a stream would naturally provoke in man a

sense of mystery, beauty and sublimity. It is not accidental that the early men looked upon them with awe and adoration; they were regarded as divinities in themselves. Likewise, unusual objects like an odd-shaped stone, a splinter from a meteor, the weird shape of a decayed tree-trunk instilled in man not only curiosity but a certain feeling of awe and reverence. The origin of shrines and of the objects of worship may be traced to these early inclinations. The early man had these inclinations not only because he was ignorant, but also because he was sensitive to the encounter with the unusual. These inclinations have survived all through man's history on earth. The accumulation of wisdom and the increase in sophistication have not dulled the

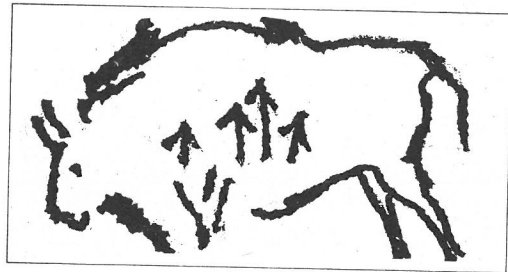
edge of these inclinations among the more sensitive of human beings even to-day. When we trace religion and art to the primitive times, they should not by any means be regarded as in themselves primitive. They are only pristine and prehistoric.

Man's creativity furthered the cause of religion and art. He did not rest content with natural shrines or natural objects of worship; he sought to create them. Probably his early efforts were to replicate whatever won his fancy. A temple-tower or the church-steeple resembles a mountain peak; the dome of a mosque resembles a hill-top. The *Linga* is perhaps the stone replica of a decayed tree-trunk or the miniature representation of an impressive mountain. But the

capacity to create images and icons transcended the limitations of the prototypes of nature. The forms of the images and the shapes of the icons naturally took numerous forms, determined by man's experiences, expectations and imaginations.

Man used icons before he made them. If we throw back our minds to a remote past, we find that man's reaction to the mysteries around him was not marked by a desire to conquer nature, but to adapt himself to it somehow. He had to fall back on his dreams and imaginations to give him the needed courage and confidence in his dealings with nature. When the cave-man set out on a hunting expedition, he naturally resorted to a powerful device of compelling actual events to follow his imaginations. He drew

a magic circle, and placed inside it a crude sketch of the animal he desired to hunt and have; or he etched on a tree, or carved on a rock, a wild animal with the drawing of an arrow struck in its body.



He may also have mumbled a few syllables from an abracadabra to reinforce the powers of his acts. He may have carried on his person the small pebble over which the abracadabra was mumbled or an unusual stone, when he started out to hunt. He quite understandably ascribed his success to this ritual or to the icon (the magical diagram, the unusual stone, or the charmed

pebble). The ritual was repeated, and the icon was preserved.

The ritual and the icon came naturally to be associated with each other; and they occupied a place of enormous importance in his simple scheme of life. When he was not carrying the icon on his person, he placed it in a spot specially meant for it, and guarded it with care and zeal, for it contained his guardian spirit, his protective deity, his 'personal god'. The spot which was the habitation of this icon was considered a 'shrine'. It was plain ground, cleaned for the purpose, or probably it was just a simple stone-platform meant to be a seat for the icon, outside his cave or rude hut, probably under a nearby tree. To guard it against intruders or lifters, he constructed a fence round it or

built for it a crude cover. The shrine-structure thus came into being.

In an icon of this sort, it is not the object itself that is as important as the imagery associated with it. The capacity of man's mind to make images and conjure up visions transforms an otherwise innocent object into an icon with a special relevance for himself. The tendency to use and make icons deepened man's awareness of himself in the milieu of the animate and the inanimate world in which he found himself. It gave him ideas of relating himself favourably to the unseen but powerful forces inhabiting and enlivening the world.

It would be incorrect, however, to imagine that man's idea of the Holy resulted in the icons. It is

actually the other way about. He first used the icons, attracted by their unusual shape or mysterious aspect. His continued contact with them made him discern an extraordinary power in them. When such an icon became more and more intimately involved in his living contact with the world, the icon was no longer just an object among other objects, but veritably a holy presence. When he lost it, he tried to make an image of it; the icon now became an artefact. He used not only his memory, but imagination and skill as well in reproducing it. Whether a natural object or an artefact, the icon inspired in him a sense of the holy. It was his personal god. It filled his mind with feelings of reverence and provided for him emotional satisfaction and confidence.

Although using or making icons is a phenomenon that is uniquely human, responsiveness to icons is reported even among the primates. Interesting in this context is a study conducted by the psychologist Wolfgang Kohler on chimpanzees. Kohler made a small image of a donkey out of rags. The image was doubtless crude, and resembled a donkey only remotely. But the psychologist's rude art made it altogether unlike any other natural object, and quite different from the familiar artefacts such as boxes and chairs. When this was introduced into the chimpanzee's field of vision, the reaction of the animal was evident fear and awe. The object, however, held the chimpanzee's interest and provoked its curiosity; but it also encouraged the animal to

keep a safe distance. The early man's response to natural icons was probably not very different, for similar would be the response even among the sophisticated folk now. Even when icons were fashioned by man's skill and in conformity with his ideas of the Holy; others still reacted to it with fear and awe—a mixed feeling called reverence.

An icon (Greek *eikon*) strictly means an image, a representation or a likeness. But an icon is characteristically an image with a difference, a representation with a new nuance of meaning, a likeness of something our eyes have actually never seen. It is not a duplication of a common object, but the concretisation of an idea concerning an unusual object. A natural icon

may be an unusually shaped rock, an odd tree trunk, or an impressive live animal. Objects that are not commonly found, like the crystal *lingas*, ammonite stones known as *Śālagrāmas*, pieces of quartz with strange veins in them, peculiar conch-shells and other marine fossils, strange shaped roots of tree, may also be selected to serve as icons. The belief that all such unusual objects contain within themselves supernatural power (now familiarly known by the Polynesian word 'mana') supported such selection. The humans that came into contact with this object, to the accompaniment of a ritual, partook of this *mana* in some measure, and thus developed a special relatedness to the icon. An icon may be looked upon as an image possessing *mana*.

When man made icons, his main interest was to introduce and incorporate some *mana* into this artefact. Hence the icon-making in the nature of a ritual. The use of an icon, when made, was also elaborately formalised with a view to induce *mana* into the icon temporarily or permanently. The shrine that housed the *mana* was also to be spacious enough to accommodate the participants and performers of the *mana*-inducing ritual. The shrine, being closely associated with the icon, was believed to partake of the *mana* that resided in the icon. Thus, the shrine itself was regarded as Holy. Because the icon was either natural, or a severely simple artefact, it did not generally admit of the application of man's artistic abilities. But man could

direct his artistic skill into the making of the shrine mysterious, beautiful and sublime. It thus developed an architecture of its own and an art style that was peculiar to it.

In the clan organization, the chieftain or the priest that bore an especial relationship with the icon was believed to share the icon's *mana*. His person was considered 'Holy', and his words were received with awe and reverence, as if they issued from the icon itself. The chieftain or the priest assumed his position on the strength of certain extraordinary abilities or adventures that he had, which were considered as obvious expressions of the *mana*. When he died, his *mana* would return to the clan to operate in some mysterious way, and the clan

members had to house it in a shrine and preserve it by rituals. This explains how numerous shrines in the world are associated with burial monuments. Such a shrine would be associated with extraordinary significance in the minds of the members of the clan. It is not so much to perpetuate the memory of the departed hero, ruler or priest, but to preserve his *mana* that such a shrine came to be erected. It was in the nature of a community shrine and in course of time, the name and exploits of the hero, ruler or priest would be forgotten, or transformed into an elaborate myth and the shrine continued to have a relevance for the folk over generations.

Death is one of the greatest of mysteries confronting man; it is all

along an unresolved riddle, and a persistent threat to all the hopes and plans of man. Perhaps, there is nothing that man fears more than death. And the fear of death is extended in a curious way to the dead too. All manners of disposal of the dead are to ensure that the dead will not return to the world of the living. The funerary monuments reveal an ambivalent attitude to keep the spirit of the dead at a safe distance, but to perpetuate his memory. The earliest of man's intuitive conjectures was that death was not the end of the person's existence on earth, that he continued to live on in some way and somewhere, and that the disembodied spirit may choose to harm or help the living. It was necessary, therefore, to take the

disposal of the dead seriously, and propitiate the spirit appropriately so that it may decide to help and not harm. Both the disposal of the dead body and the propitiation of the continuing spirit became woven into elaborate magical rituals.

It might strike one as blasphemous that many of the important shrines of the present day can be traced to burial practices. But it can hardly be disputed. When the pious and wealthy Nāṭṭukōṭi Chetṭiars of Tamiḻ Nādu undertook to renovate many of the dilapidated Śiva shrines in the region called Chetṭināḍu in the heart of the Tamiḻ Country, it was discovered that under the floor of the sanctum in most of these shrines funerary pots, heaps of ash, and skeletal remains

had been placed. In fact, the old Tamiḻ term for shrine, *pallippaḍai*, signifies the spot where the dead person (“one who has gone to interminable sleep”) is buried. Tamiḻ inscriptions of the middle ages describe many Śiva temples as such shrines. There are at least sixteen of such sepulchral shrines with inscriptional evidence in the Tamiḻ Country. The most important among them is the Ariñjiśvara Temple (‘arinjigai īśvarathu mahādevi’) built by the Chola Monarch Rāja-Rāja I (985-1014 A.D.) who also built the famous Bṛhadiśvara Temple at Tañjāvūr. This temple was built in memory of his grandfather Ariñjaya at Mēlpāḍi in North Arcot District. An earlier temple of this sort was the Ādityeśvara temple at Toṇḍaimānād in Chittoor district,

built by Pārantaka I (941 A.D.) on the mortal remains of his father Āditya I (870-907 A.D.). There are at least six of such temples in Dārāsura alone. All of such shrines were associated with Lakulīṣa-Pāśupata cult (Śaivite).

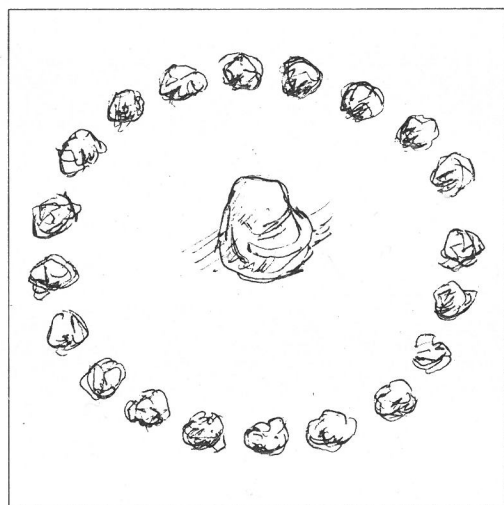
It was an ancient custom to denote the spot where the dead body was buried by erecting on it a mound of earth and rubble. The mound in fact represented the mountain. The background belief was that the disembodied spirit soars up onto a mountain. The celebrity of Kailāsa as the abode of Śiva may be traced to this belief. It was also a widespread practice in very early times to drag the dead body to a mountain top and leave it there. Burial and cremation were later methods of

disposal. The burial mounds were a usual feature in the territorial arrangement of primitive clans. When the dead person was a respected chieftain or a priest of high status, the mound would naturally have to be larger and more impressive and lasting, for it was believed to house a powerful *mana*. It would also be periodically visited by people, and regarded with veneration by them. Myths would in course of time gather round the shrine, and the eulogy of the *mana* would attract devotees who gathered there to propitiate the spirit. The simple funerary mound would thus be transformed into an elaborate structure of religious significance.

The stone age graves make an interesting study. Numerous clans

and tribes in India continued this practice until comparatively recent times. After the dead body was buried, three large stones were placed in the centre (gathered up in a heap), and a ring of stones enclosed them.

Toḍas of Nīlgiris burn their dead inside a circle of stones, and bury the ashes in the same spot. They erect an upright stone block over the remains and surround it by



Ring of Stones

rough, round or conical stones placed in a circle. Their funeral huts are also built inside a ring of stones. The hut is meant to receive the spirit of the dead; it is called the 'home of death' (*sāvumane*). The three stones that were kept on the buried body were apparently meant to prevent his ghost from getting up and coming out of the grave to torment the living. The two side-stones developed into pillars and the central stone was placed on top of the superstructure erected over these pillars. The funerary hut was square or circular in plan, and the sloping roof over it was invariably conical or pyramidal, symbolising the soaring up of the spirit. (Cf. N. Venkataramaiah, *An essay on the origin of South Indian Temple*, Madras, 1930). The shrines for the *bhūta* in coastal Karnāṭaka and

Kerala have preserved this primitive form.

The ring of stones represents a magic circle to preserve the central stone's *mana* (which symbolises the spirit of the dead person). The central stone stood for the mound, and later when the stone had to be more impressive, it assumed the form of a low sepulchral tumulus (*stūpa*), or a conical or pyramidal structure (*vimāna*).

The *stūpas* have been well-known in India from the Buddha's own days and earlier also. There is a reference to Vishṇu's *stūpa* in *Rgveda*. They represent an interesting and important aspect of Indian architecture. But the *stūpa* was not a Buddhist innovation. Jouean-Dubreuil has shown that the

stūpa form was directly derived from the Vedic tomb. The tomb called *agnidriya*, was hemispherical and hollow, with a central shaft and two raised stone platforms on either side of the shaft meant for the *agni* and *soma* rituals; the dome was made in timber and covered with clay. The whole structure was in imitation of the ancient hut. The central shaft was a clever device to serve as chimney, for the rituals inside the *agnidriya* which involved setting up of fires. In fact, the 'agnidriya' is not a tomb as the French scholar supposed, but was spot set apart for the fire-ritual associated with the cult of Manes (*Rgveda* 10, 57, 3) involving eulogy of the dead (*nārāśamsa*).

It is true that the Buddhist adaptation of the *stūpa* was unique

as a religious monument. When Aśoka is reputed to have built 84,000 stūpas, they were not all of them burial mounds; they were more in the nature of memorial structures. But each stūpa was to contain a relic of the Buddha or of some honoured sage. The renowned stūpa at Sāñchī, for instance, contains the relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, two of the most eminent disciples of the Buddha, who died in Nālandā in Bihār.

The temple may be regarded as a direct descendent of the stūpa which in its turn had been probably evolved from the primitive funerary mound. The custom of installing a stone-block or *linga* in the spot where the burial had taken place is even now prevalent in India. And the tombs of saints (*samādhi* or *brindāvana*) continue to function as

shrines. There is also the custom of planting trees over the burial spot or the place in which the funerary urn (in cases of cremation) has been hidden. These are referred to as *chaitya-vrkshas* (from the Sanskrit word *chiti*, which means cremation) and are held as sacred. The spirit of the dead is believed to inhabit certain species of trees, which received worship by proxy. It is not an accidental occurrence that almost every important temple in India is associated with a tree, called *sthala-vrksha* ('shrine-tree'). It is reasonable to assume that the presence of such a tree invited in due course the construction of a shrine in its vicinity, or over the very spot in case of the original tree's decay and disappearance. The legends concerning the famous shrines in India strongly suggest this background.

CHAPTER II

THE FOLK APPROACHES

India is known as the land of temples. But the world knows only its great temples, the temples that are vast complexes of stylized structures, much of which, however, appears today irrelevant or unused. They are in fact excesses of human effort, designed more for monumental effect than for utility. They are shrines to be seen and admired rather than worshipped in. They were products of political fortunes, economic affluence and technical competence. Royal patronage and craft-guilds encouraged a degree of sophistication that was not only beyond the comprehension of the lay folk but was obviously unrelated to their normal needs.

More numerous and more significant than these great temples are the mean shrines that one finds on the road-side or in remote villages. They articulate a more authentic urge and answer a more genuine need. They are not creations of artistic imagination or aristocratic fancy, but are spontaneous and natural. They belong to small homogenous groups of uncritical people whose attachments are narrow but intense. These are the folk shrines; and they reveal a remarkable continuity. They persist with an unusual vigour, and exhibit an unmistakable relevance.

To understand this apparent paradox, it is necessary to consider

two aspects of Indian life: its character of being an ethnic and cultural mosaic, and its essentially rural slant. India presents a population that is a tangled web of racial admixture. The process of racial admixture began over seven thousand years ago and has since been a continuous one. It is thus that Indian culture has become a veritable museum of beliefs and practices, customs and codes of conduct, approaches and achievements.

In the field of religion, especially, the outsider is likely to despair at the wide variety of conceptions and aspirations, and at their more varied incarnation in shrines and rituals. Rural-urban distinction has always been

fundamental in India, although the trend from rural to the urban, from folk to the sophisticated, is widely in evidence all over the country. The village is functionally a small group, more homogenous than otherwise, isolated by and large, and governed by direct person-to-person relation. Rural life is ruled by kinship ties and intimate interests and attachments.

The great temples that steal the show are characteristically urban in their emphasis; and each of them reflects a regional culture that can almost be described as unique. They are sophisticated institutions. Art, economy, industry, craft, social organization and political involvements have got mixed up here with purely religious feelings and

sentiments. They reflect predominantly urban needs, regional orientations, and situational pressures.

They are creatures of time, and bear markedly the impact of the 'spirit' of the times. That is why they lose their relevance when the time passes. It is usual for them to get ruined, more by neglect than by vandalism. They thus succeed in becoming more of show-pieces than they were originally intended. They exhibit the 'syndrome of decay'.

The folk shrines, on the other hand, continue as they have always been: simple, serene, unsophisticated and intensely human. These shrines do not lose their relevance, because their folk character does not weaken.

All temples, great or small, have an essential appeal to the people in whose neighbourhood the temples are located. But sophistication can wedge a gulf between the structure and its function. Great and mighty temples may be historically significant, but they are devoid of the folk content because of sophistication: they cease to be meaningful to the people who live in its neighbourhood.

Sophistication has played its role at several stages of our religious evolution; but there is a persistence of the most primitive of the assumptions and aspirations beneath the veneer of sophistication. The most primitive can survive the stresses of change only when it is also the most valid in the folk

context. The most modern man can survive only because the most ancient instincts are alive in him. The solution to man's problems is always archaic.

The primitive is not to be confused with the 'backward', 'savage' or 'childish'. The primitive is not even pre-literate. It is not merely a condition that is natural, but original and authentic. It is, for this reason, simple and devoid of later accretions and reinforcements that derive from sophistication.

What is primitive may appear irrational and uncritical. It would be more proper to describe it as arational and acritical, for it is not a matter of deficiency but it relates to the folk temperament that is unsophisticated and unanalytical. The

intellect is subordinated to faith, criticism to fervour, nationalism to intensity of attachment. The folk canvas is no doubt narrow, but it is deep. It encourages participation of all members in each of its proceedings. The sophisticated facet insists on greater or lesser depersonalization, while the folk-primitive seeks the maximization of persons and actualization of individuals.

In many of our temples, it is easy to discern the continuum that obtains between the folk and the sophisticated. For in our religion, the primitive and the advanced co-exist remarkably peacefully. No insider will ever break his neck over this paradox. The sophisticated grows out of the folk, and it is not

unnatural that the mother and her child are found together. Religion as it is is stylized, systematized and institutionalized. It is the expression of sophistication. The major religions of the world as we know them today are creatures of the intellect and functions of growth. They are developmental coefficients.

But are they not all derived from, and rooted in, the basic needs and urges enshrined in human constitution? In India, the folk element in religion is ubiquitous and persistent. It is natural, therefore, that the Indian temple has a folk undercurrent despite the sophisticated superstructure. When the superstructure is immense and overpowering, it is sophisticated, whereas when the primitive is

abundant and effective it is described as folk.

Sophistication projects differences and divisions, regional and temporal. It encourages the conscious processes of deliberate planning, rational understanding, and careful rationalizations. It seeks to introduce coherence and harmony by accommodating changes in a welter of acceptances and rejections. Sophistication differentiates and attempts to integrate each differentiated unit.

There is, nevertheless, a conscious master-plan which is sought to be actualized; individuals are moulded by conscious motives and are only loosely held together in a community or neighbourhood,

also by conscious threads. The folk elements, on the other hand, are guided solely by unconscious processes. They touch the human depth, beyond the differentiations engineered by sophistication. And they invariably encounter the reality of human existence, which is one and undivided. The folk culture is what is common to all cultures, while sophistication isolates each culture and props up its separate existence.

Indian temples have their regional styles. Their structures and functions have changed in accordance with the needs of the times and with the prevailing ethos. The great temples in the far-removed regions of this sub-continent present a variety that is unmistakable. The great temple of Tañjāvūr in Tamil

Nadu and the great temple of Bhubanesvar in Orissa differ both in the way they look and in the manner in which they function. Each region in the country has its own characteristic temple-culture.

But it is easily seen that deep beneath this baffling variety is the common undercurrent of folk mores and ways. This is what unites and integrates what otherwise would be a "thing of shreds and patches." Indian temples can all be related with one another, and can become equally meaningful to people belonging to diverse ethnic and ethnic groups, because they are alike derived from the folk origin.

It is this folk origin of Indian temples that gives them the vitality, the appeal and validity. To the extent

that the temple is removed from its folk moorings, it increasingly loses its relevance; the more sophisticated a temple is, the less authentic it becomes, and is well on the way to ruin. The ruins may be magnificent, but they are ruins nevertheless. The Indian temples that have the greatest appeal among the Indian masses are those that have retained intact their intimate contact with their folk origins. Consider, as instances, the great temple of Jaganātha at Puri, the celebrated temple atop the Tirumalai hills in Āndhra Pradesh, the famous Vindhyavāsini and Kāmākhyā temples, the Meenākshi temple at Madhurai in Tamiḻ-Nādu, the Kālī temple in Calcutta, and Vaishṇavī-devī shrine in Kashmīr. If we examine the cults that are peculiarly

associated with these shrines and the seemingly strange practices that are prevalent in them, we would not fail to discover folk elements that are not only dominant but universal. The folk elements are dominant because they concern the basic human urges, and they are universal because of the same reason.

The various temples in India that continue to be popular (not among the tourists but among the devotees) are like so many peaks on a mountain range. They are distinct inasmuch as they stand out separately, apart from each other in space and time; but their separate existences are made possible by the continuous folk mass that spreads uniformly beneath them. This folk mass comprehends not only the

unsophisticated, unanalytical bulk of our population (strewn over different geographical areas, belonging to several linguistic zones, accommodated in diverse caste groups and exhibiting different degrees of urbanization) but the so-called tribals also.

The tribal population in India today has been estimated to be about forty million; it is large, relative to the other population. It is also diverse, about four hundred tribes inhabiting different regions and speaking different languages. It is important to note that tribals are not 'outsiders' to the general mass of our unsophisticated, unanalytical population.

They represent an earlier phase of our life that has somehow

survived till our own day. We were all tribals once upon a time, but we managed to become increasingly sophisticated and leave behind our tribal stage. But some of our customs and practices today, both at home and in the community, distinctly reveal our tribal background. Especially our religious assumptions and aspirations, however concealed by layers of modernity, hearken to the tribal moorings. In many of the great temples (such as the Jagannātha temple at Puri, Vindhyavāsini temple, Kāmākhyā temple, and the Tirumalai temple) we find even today survivals of customs and practices that throng at these shrines tribals figure prominently.

It is well-known that the present fabric of Indian population

was fashioned out of the tribal-nomadic threads of Negritos (who arrived in India in a remote past from Africa through Arabia, Iran and Baluchistan), Pro-Australoids (who migrated into India from the West), and other nomadic tribes that streamed into India and settled down here. The population that was more or less well-integrated, incorporating all these tribal hordes, has been called proto-Indic. It is this primitive population that was responsible for the genesis of what may be called Indian culture, the first historical expression of which was the Indus Valley civilization, followed by the Vedic period of reintegration and reorientation around 8000 B.C.

Indian culture is thus basically a tribal culture, individuals owing

allegiance to small, close-knit and direct encounter groups. There has been an unbroken continuity of this culture all through our history, despite successive spasms of sophistication. Its early phase, characterized as the 'Vrātya', was essentially folk, in its content as well as orientation. It was the pre-sophistication stage. It is interesting that in a medieval grammatical work (Bhaṭṭoji-dīkshita's comm. on Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, 5, 2, 21) we find the explanation of Vrātya as the people who preferred to lead simple lives by manual labour (*śarīrāyāsa*) rather than by the glamour of intelligence (*buddhi-vaibhava*). Intelligence did introduce a major shift in emphasis in later times, and the folk character of Indian culture was successfully

camouflaged by aspects of sophistication.

Temples in India began as elements of folk culture, incidental to the 'Vrātya' temperament. They were structures that were designed to fulfil simple and direct needs of small groups of closely-knit people. They were thus no more than mean shrines, often in jungles, on the outskirts of villages, or in the centre of the tribal settlements. They were mainly enclosures facilitating periodical congregations, around a cult-object more frequently improvised for the occasion than permanently fixed. Rituals were naturally more important than the icons, although icons themselves were looked upon with especial reverence and fear.

A Shrine is the material basis for an unusual or supernatural presence. This presence may be spontaneous and may permanently abide in a place (sanctum) or in an object (icon). Alternately, it may be invoked on occasions by a special procedure known as ritual. The folk shrine answers to the latter description. It comes into being as occasion demands, and its validity depends upon the efficacy with which the rituals are conducted. The folk temple is thus an enclosure set apart for ritualistic procedures (songs, dances, incantations, magical acts and so on). The enclosure itself is not regarded with religious sentiments; it acquires sanctity when it becomes the scene of rituals and ceremonial congregations.

Anthropologists characterize primitive beliefs and practices as animistic, an expression that has acquired a rather unfavourable value. Animism is, as a matter of fact, a belief that all things, even the supposedly inanimate objects, are animated by life in their essential nature. Some cultures, however, identify life with a 'living soul', and thus animism has come to mean attribution of personality or soul to all objects around us. Anthropologists are prone to ignore the fact that such attribution is not indiscriminate, unaltered or universal. It is only some objects that are selected for this attribution and the attribution is accomplished by rituals. The emphasis is not so much on the presence of the

animating principle as on the manner in which it is actualized.

Malinowski hit upon a truth when he said that magic and animism go together to constitute man's response to his sense of insecurity in the world, although the famous anthropologist did not realize the full import of this clubbing of the terms together. Magic derives its rationale from animism, and animism as a mere belief acquires practical value only by magic. Magic has no basis apart from animism, and animism bears no fruit without magic. It is magic that animates an object that is otherwise inanimate. The folk shrine is a site for magical proceedings.

The shrine with an icon in it is a later achievement. In many of

the folk cults in India, the shrine is merely a place where the masks, the weapons, the ornaments and musical instruments that the dancers employ during the occasions of spirit-invocation are preserved. In the West coast (Tuḷu-nāḍu), there are numerous shrines which are either empty enclosures or which contain a bare room with a swing-cot placed in it. Often a small lamp will illumine the dark interior. The paraphernalia of the dancer (masks made of wood, silver or gold, a sword, a bell, fly-whisk, headdress elaborately prepared, bangles, anklets etc.) are kept there: it is called the 'treasure' (bhaṇḍāra) of the spirit, whom the dancer impersonates.

Such shrines were originally thatched huts (*koṭṭige* or 'shed')

which were more in the nature of storehouses than spots of worship. During special occasions, they would construct large and tastefully decorated pandals, not only to provide space for the dance rituals but to accommodate large numbers of people that would gather. The old name for such assemblies was 'ayana', which later came to mean 'festival' (Utsava). The place housing the thatched hut 'or the brick and mortar building with a circular tiled roof, as it came to be later and including the area necessary for the pandal to be occasionally erected' was consecrated as the shrine. It was consecrated only in the sense that it was kept apart for this purpose, and it was out of bounds for people who were unclean or outside the tribe. It was a community

enclosure, not owned by any individual but belonging to the whole group or tribe. The rituals were occasions for all the members of the tribe to assemble and participate in the proceedings.

Usually the enclosure was under or near a large tree, and the tribal regard that was accorded to the enclosure was shared by the tree. Oftentimes, the enclosure was devoid of any material structure such as the shrine-hut or the fence around the enclosure: the enclosure was an abstract entity, identified by the people solely by folk memory. In such a case, the tree associated with the enclosure would naturally assume considerable importance: it stood for the sacred enclosure, and thus partook of the sancity of the enclosure.

The sacred enclosure would readily materialize during festivals or occasional ceremonies, and hold the attention of the people. The enclosure came to be known as 'maṇḍapa', which means the area which constitutes the very essence of tribal existence. Decoration of the shrine, dance of the priest whom the spirit was supposed to possess, oracular consultations with him, fire-walking, animal sacrifices, community feast and other tribal entertainments would highlight the occasional functions within the enclosure.

During the rest of the time, the tree would be there to remind the tribals of the sanctified enclosure. It would be there as a mute but interested witness to all the

proceedings that would go on during the festive occasions inside the pandal. The tree would be a more continuous and more concrete presence. The pandal would appear and disappear; but the tree would continue for all time. The spirit that would be invoked during the ritual, and that would possess the dancing priest (*pātri*) on the occasion, would otherwise reside in the tree. Thus the tree came to represent the spirit, or at any rate its natural habitat, and evoked among the unsophisticated folk feelings of awe, fear and reverence.

The spirit that resided in the tree has no form; but the form and movements of the tree would represent the presence and activities of the spirit. The spirit was the

central concept in tribal life; it not only integrated the individual and protected him from dangers and death, but organized the simple society of the tribe. By an act of transference the tree became the central fact in tribal life.

Scholars who seek to explain tree worship in India by taking recourse to animistic, totemistic, erotic and other theories appear to ignore the simple but obvious fact that Indians do not worship all the trees and plants that have grown on this soil. Not even all the specimens of the so-called 'sacred' trees (like the *aśvattha*, *vaṭa* and *bilva*) are worshipped. It is only the tree that is associated with a shrine that is worshipped. In a village, not more than two or three trees among the

hundreds that might be there receive special attention and devotion. A tree does not become sacred merely because it is a tree; its sanctity is dependent upon its association with a sacred enclosure. We should also remember in this context that most of the famous temples in India have their own specific trees, and that these trees are all called 'enclosure trees' (*sthala-vṛksha*). Another tree of the same species growing outside the temple-enclosure will fail to receive any attention. It is the enclosure that makes all the difference.

When a mighty tree is not to be found in or around the consecrated enclosure, the place is identified by a rock that might be there, or an unusual boulder, or an odd-looking large stone. This would

discharge the same function as the tree: it would be the normal habitat of the spirit, and it would be the guardian of the enclosure and of the people who periodically assemble in the enclosure. The rock or stone represents the spirit, and merits worship. Again, not every rock or stone in the country is worshipped by Indians, notwithstanding the frequent charge of barbaric animism against them. It is only the stone that is associated with a sacred enclosure that is worshipped.

In course of time, the enclosure loses its tribal significance, and the stone becomes enshrined in a temple in its own right. There are innumerable temples in India that contain in their sanctum nothing but natural rocks or stones that are

otherwise indistinguishable from other stones of the same shape and size. These rocks and stones, untouched by the sculptor's chisel or hammer, are regarded as icons or rather as aniconic representations of divinity. There are instances of famous temples dedicated to several sophisticated gods and goddesses (like Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, Durgā and Subrahmaṇya), which house in their sanctums only rocks, or large or small stones: Kedāreśvra in Kedārnāth, Viśvanātha in Vāraṇāsi, Kāmākhyā in Kāmarūp, Mahākāla in Ujjain, Narasimha in Ahobilam, Mūkāmbikā in Kollūr, Gaṇapathi in Kumbhāsi (Anegudḍe) and Mangalādevī of Mangalore are among the better known of such temples.

Here indeed is to be found the genesis of *linga*-worship in our

country. We will have occasion to deal with it in a future section. But it should be mentioned here that the oldest shrines are those that have been built over rocks and stones, and the purpose was to commemorate the tribal significance of these stones as representatives of the enclosure meant for tribal rituals. Oftentimes, the area covered by the outer compound-walls (*prākāras*) of a stylized temple represents the ancient tribal enclosure; and the sanctum is associated with the tree or stone that originally stood within it. The *mukha-maṇḍapa* stands for the old pandal that would be erected on occasions to facilitate tribal assemblies.

CHAPTER III

MASKS, MOUNTAINS AND SERPENTS

There are several shrines all over the country, (especially in Orissa, Assam, Tamil-Nāḍu and along the West Coast) which have upright stones or wooden blocks in their central cells. Their names as well as the rituals associated with them suggest that they were originally blocks on which animals were sacrificed during tribal rituals. Such a block would be held as especially sacred during ceremonies, and on other days the block would be an object of tabu.

To enforce the tabu restrictions concerning physical contact, the block would be fenced off, thus providing

the original model for the sanctum. The stone or wooden block on which the animals were sacrificed would soon be enclosed in a shrine, and the animal sacrifice would require another wooden or stone block in front of it and in the open. This latter contrivance was the prototype of the later altar (*balipīṭha*) in the stylized temple. Interesting and relevant is the Āgama description of the altar as the duplicate of the sanctum. It is a custom in many temples in the South as well as the North for the devotees to break the cocoanut and place their offerings at the altar.

The stone or wooden blocks over which shrines were later constructed came also to be carved in course of time. Early carvings were naturally minimal and suggestive; they were also symbolic. The form that the sculptor sought to give to the block depended, among other things, upon the shape and size of the block itself. This is how in many celebrated shrines, while the exterior is most exquisitely fashioned, elaborately planned and delicately carved, the icon in the sanctum is aesthetically crude, often incompletely sculpted and hurriedly finished. It is rarely that a grand temple also houses a fine icon in its sanctum. The reason for this anomaly is not far to seek: the block on which the icon is carved is a tribal left-over, while the temple

structures are products of sophistication. The ancient temples grew over the icons. But the modern temple will import an image into its central shrine after the temple is completed; the image in them will also be a sophisticated work of art.

The form that the sculptor gave to the wooden or stone block that survives the disappearance of the tribe follows the natural grains and the shape that it has. The sectarian prejudice plays a part in the sculptor's mission, but the part is a subdued one. More often than not, no image in the sanctum in any of the ancient and celebrated temples answers accurately to Agamic injunctions or fulfils neatly the sectarian expectations. It is a historical fact that many temples

have been appropriated by different sects successively, and the central image has had frequently to shift its sectarian affiliations. Notwithstanding the sculptor's attempt to give the stone or wooden block a form that the devotees can understand, appreciate and remember, the fact that the block itself was held sacred gave the sculptor some freedom.

Whatever the original shape or form of the block or icon in the central shrine, the custom of covering it over by a mask helped the devotee get an image of it that is stylized and familiar. The mask also is a left-over from the tribal background. Masks emerged in the context of dances and sacred dramas that were parts of the ritual conducted within the enclosure.

It may be recalled that drama as an art-form grew out of the primitive religious rituals. This is how drama in India, Greece, Japan and Europe developed. In the Dionisian cult, the main feature of the worship was a procession of dancers, intoxicated by wine and wearing animal masks. In fact, they were called goatmen. Wearing a mask symbolized that the dancer was possessed by the animal or god whose mask he was wearing; it meant that his physical frame was 'taken over' by the animal or god for the time being. This is what the Greeks called 'inspiration' ('breathed into by the spirit'). It is also interesting that the actor in Greece was called 'the hypocrite' (literally meaning "one who answers"); he was 'double-faced' because he

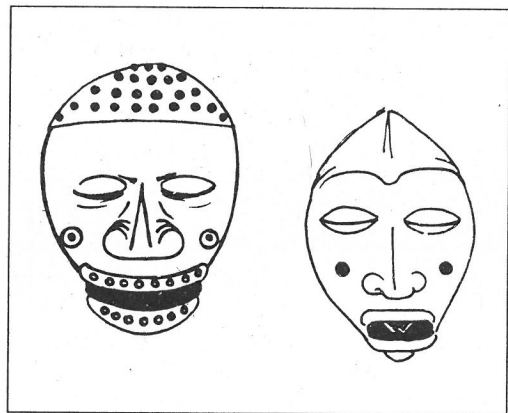


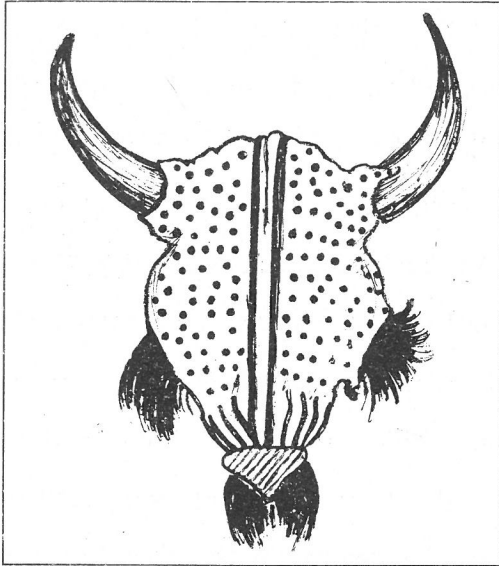
invariable wore a mask (*persona*) that hid his real face and projected a false one.

Many ancient tribes of Africa, Australia and the Pacific Islands seek the help of mask-wearing shamans during their daily life. the tribals of New Guinea fashion their masks from human skulls. The religious dances in Tibet, Śrī-Lanka, British Columbia, Western and Central Africa and among the Red Indians are dominated by masks, most of which are designed to strike awe

and terror in the hearts of the participant tribals. In ancient Egypt and Greece, it was a custom to bury their dead kings and queens covering their faces with golden masks.

Indian masks go back to a very distant past and have survived to our own day. The Oungs inhabiting the Andamans conceal their faces in thick paints, as also the Koṇḍs of Madhya Pradesh, and in a sophisticated and aesthetically alluring manner the Kathakali dancers of Keraḷa. The wooden





*The mask worn by tribal dancers
of the Bastar region*

masks of the Bhuiya, Muria and Baiga tribes are worn while hunting or while dancing in certain magical procedures like exorcism and spirit propitiation. Along the Himālayan ranges, many tribes have evolved an extensive variety of masks for different occasions. Masks are still worn in India during religious dances, and in dance-dramas with mythological themes.

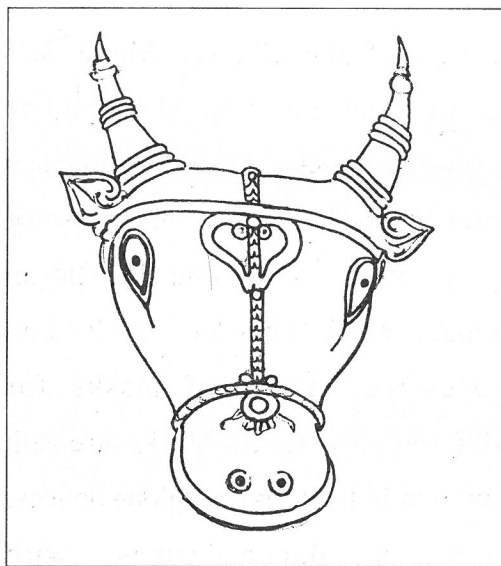
Most of the religious masks are those of animals, with human attributes ascribed to them. In the regions along the West Coast (Tuḷu-nāḍu and Keraḷa), the employment of masks during religious ceremonies is universal, and many of them are animal masks: pig (*Pañjurli*), tiger (*Pili-bhūta*), horse (*Jarandāye*), bull (*Nandi-goṇa*), and buffalo (*Mahishandāye*) are well known in Tuḷu-Nāḍu. Serpent (*Nāga-kanye*), tiger (*Puli-teyyam*) and monkey (*Bāli-teyyam*) are common in North Malabar in Keraḷa. These animals are elevated to the rank of divinities and their masks are worshipped in the shrines.

The important feature to be noticed in such worship is that the masks are often represented as

complete animals, effigies of which are made and installed in temples. The background belief was that the spirits, who are formless, employ these animals as their characteristic vehicles, and wander about the tribal area, guarding the devotees and warning them against misfortune. As the spirits are not visible, the forms of animals which are supposed to carry them around are used as masks to indicate the presence of these spirits. By a natural process of extension, the animals themselves come to possess the attributes of the spirits.

But the actual animals roaming about do not receive any worship; it is only their iconic representations, effigies or masks that are considered as possessing the power and prestige

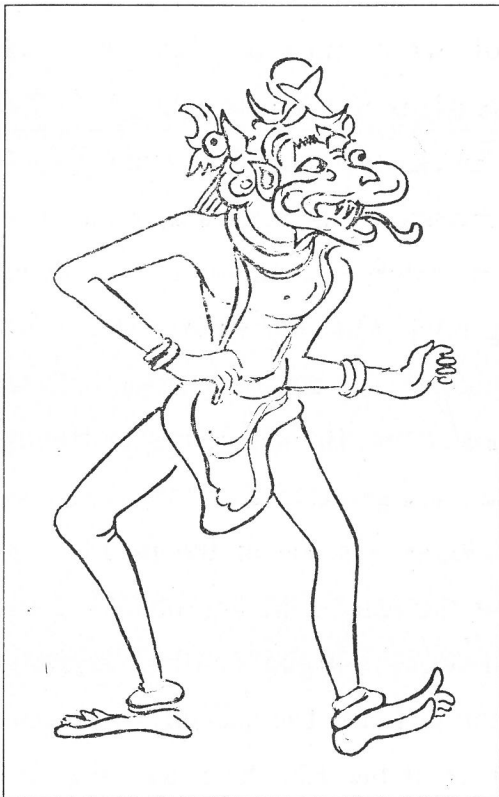
of the spirits. As in the case of the sacred trees, the sacred animals are those that are involved in the rituals conducted in the sacred enclosure. Any pig that one sees is not Pañjurli, and any tiger in the jungle does not become Pili-bhūta. Pañjurli's pig is an iconic one and Pili-bhūta resides in the tiger representation, as they are made to function within the enclosure or shrine (*sāna*). The pig



Mahisandāye mask

or tiger that represents the spirit is not an ordinary one, but possesses extraordinary powers that other animals of the species do not.

It is usual, therefore, to represent these extraordinary spirit-



Hanumān as a spirit (Bāli dancer)

representing animals in unusual modes. The Nandi-goṇa or the Bull-spirit, for instance, may have five heads. Or the animal may be represented as part human: Pañjurli has the human body with the head of a wild pig; Hanumān-teyyam is in man's form with the monkey's head. This is the origin of composite figures of divinities like Haya-grīva, Varāha, Hanumān, Garuḍa, Narasimha, and Gaṇeśa, who figure in the Indian pantheon of later days. There can be little doubt that these were only masks used by the folk dancers once upon a time, for in all these composite forms it is only the head that is animal.

There is an additional circumstance which supports the folk origin of these later and popular

divinities. During the special occasions (lie kola, nema, ayana and baṇḍi), when the priest impersonates the spirit (called 'bhūtada māṇi' in Kannaḍa) and dances around, long legends in the local dialect (Tulu) are recited, extolling the qualities of the spirit and recounting his advent and exploits. These recitations are called 'Pāḍ-dānas', the exact meaning of which expression has been forgotten but is frequently explained as songs orally communicated. Each spirit has his own specific 'pāḍ-dāna', which is recited during his personation and propitiation. This appears mainly to achieve the audio-visual fixation of the image of the spirit in the minds of the hundreds of tribal participants that would assemble on the occasion. An examination of the content and

style of some of these *pāḍ-dānas* will clearly bring out the dominant element of folk-lore in them. Such association of folk-lore with religious dances can be found among all the tribals in India.

This seems to be an early strata of what may be described as religious literature or mythology. The *Purāṇas* as legendary accounts of divinities with a curious admixture of history and myth have indeed grown out of early traditions contained in the folklore such as the *Pāḍ-dāna*. Human beings and gods come together and transact business without a sense of the paradoxical or the fear of the improbable. They discuss, argue and conclude transactions. The dialogues that form part of the *Pāḍ-dānas* and that are independently instituted as standard

verbal exchanges (nuḍi-kaṭṭu) between the spirit and the tribal chief remind us strongly of the dialogal hymns in *Rg-Veda*.

There are about twenty such hymns incorporated in the Rig-Vedic collection. Important ones are those between Yama the god of death and his sister Yamī (10,10), Urvaśī the celestial hymph and Purūravas the earthly monarch (10, 95), Viśvāmitra the sage and the river (3, 33), Agastya the sage and his wife Lopāmudrā (1,179), the heavenly hound Saramā and the Paṇi marauders (10, 108). These dialogues are no doubt odd in the Vedic context, and the reason for their inclusion in this poetical corpus is uncertain. They are obviously remnants of folk-lore, if we trust

the great Vedic commentator Sāyaṇa, who attempts to recall and provide the legendary frameworks for them. Do they not suggest the existence of an immense oral literature, very much like the Tuḷu *Pāḍ-dānas* in both structure and function, in the days much anterior to the compilation of Vedic hymns? Do they not also indicate that the context in which these dialogal and narrative hymns were recited was the religious dance-drama in a tribal assemblage, again like the *bhūta*-festivals in Tuḷu-nāḍu of Keraḷa?

The early shrine was under the tree that stood within the tribal enclosure for religious rites. The celebrity of the tree was derived from its location in the sacred site, and the sanctity of the shrine from

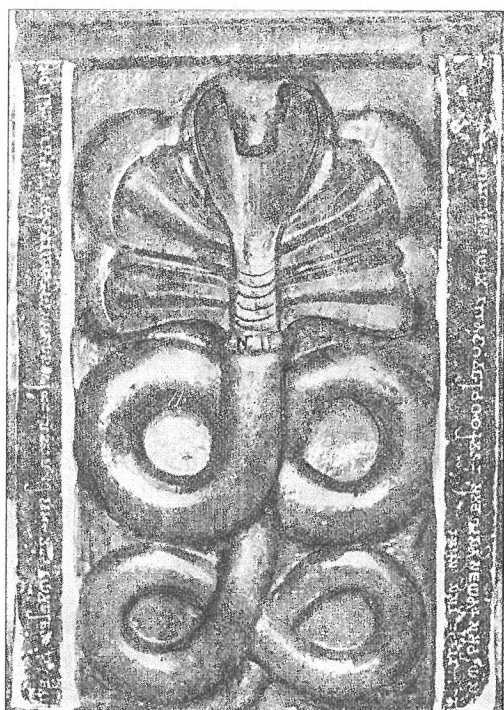
its association with the tree. The shrine in its initial phase was just a crude little hut, covering a stone or rock which represented the guardian spirit of the tribe. The rock was a miniature mountain, and the tree symbolized tribal life. The rock under the tree was the static aspect, while the tree itself was dynamic. It is not a coincidence that in the tribal imagination the spirit of the dead passed into mountains and trees. The tribal shrine under the tree was also the material basis for ancestor worship. It was the abode of all the earlier heroes of the tribe.

The occasion of funeral was also part of the religious life of the primitives, as it continues to be with the sophisticated. As the corpse was carried to the tree in an improvised

chariot (*ratha* or *baṇḍi*), there were dances in which masks were worn. There were also songs eulogizing the valour and victories of the dead hero, recalling his tribal loyalty and assuring him of the tribal aid in his journey beyond death. The funeral procession would conduct the dead man to the mountain or to the tree. Later, the custom of erecting a mound over the spot where the dead one is buried, and planting a tree there continued this compulsive association of a tribal with the tree and the rock under it. The *chaitya-vṛkshas* and *sthala-vṛkshas* that abound in India are to be traced to this custom.

It is an ancient and universal symbolism that the tree and the

serpent are twin spirits. It is so well-known that it hardly needs elaboration here. Big trees and huge ant-hills being together is common sight in India; the forest tribes are naturally impressed by the serpents that freely move around amidst the branches and foliage of giant trees.



*The Nāga slab from
Banavāsi (Karnāṭaka)*



*An ancient Nāga-slab from a garden
dedicated to the sepents in Nandalike*

There is no doubt that serpents are symbols of fertility; but the symbolism is by no means erotic. Serpents as religious symbols have been found in India from the days of the Indus Valley civilization. The seals found in Mohenjo-dāro and Harappa depict close association of trees with serpents. Vedic hymns



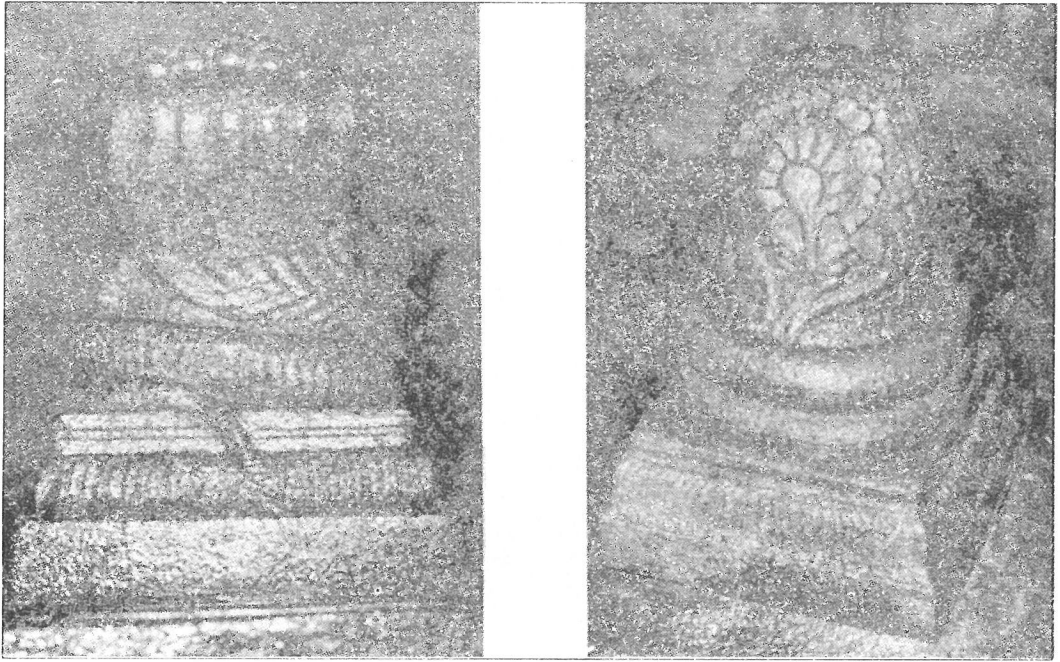
The Nāga icon in the Brahmasthāna shrine in Posrālu (South Kanara)

contain references to the dragon Vṛtra or Ahi who is a powerful rival to Indra himself. The serpent-lore in India is not only vast and varied, but very old and persisting.

A life-size stone sculpture of the hooded serpent was found at chargoan and has been preserved in

the Mathura Museum. Belonging to the age of Huvishka, the Scythian monarch, it bears an inscription which tells us that the brothers Senahasti and Bhonuka got this image made as a “propitiation to the worshipful Nāga” (*priyatti bhagava Nāga*). This suggests the great antiquity of serpent-slabs (*nāga-śilā*) as objects of worship in the country. Not only are serpent-slabs installed under trees and within temple-enclosures as votive monuments or to discharge vows, but serpent-motifs are involved in decorations, ornaments, dress and embellishments in religious as well as secular contexts.

More interestingly, there are shrines in India, especially in the South, containing in the sanctum



The front and back views of the serpent sitting in the shape of a linga, the icon worshipped in the Subrahmanya temple in the coastal region of Karnataka

huge ant-hills, which are worshipped as Valmīkeśvara ('The Lord of the Ant-hill'). Images of Subrahmanya (Skanda) are frequently found in serpentine shape, either entirely so or as half-human and half-serpent. Śiva shrines encourage installation of serpent-icons within its precincts,

because Śiva is supposed to wear serpents as his ornaments. The serpent-idea enters the Viṣṇu temple, as the bed of the Lord (Ananta-śayana). Śakti and the serpent are intimately associated in legend and iconography. Ancient wooden images of Durgā found in



Another Nāga image in the form of a mountain in Posrālu

Kerala and Tuḷu-nāḍu have the serpent-symbol on their forehead and in their crown.

The serpents are frequently represented in stone-sculptures with five or seven hoods, and in diverse kinds of knots. It is usual to depict two serpents in amorous embrace;

it is also usual to represent serpents with human heads and torsoes. Sometimes the serpent is shown as seated in the form of a *linga*. Infrequently but interestingly, serpents are fancied as having the heads of cocks for their hoods; in the Jaina framework, a cock is pictured as having a serpent's head (*kukkuṭa-sarpa*). Many are the ways in which the serpent-idea is worked out in Indian art and architecture. Despite its apparently independent representation, the underlying association of the serpent-figure with the mountain-concept cannot be missed. The Sanskrit expression 'Nāga' has a dual connotation: serpent and mountain. Numerous are the literary images which involve this association. Serpent-sculptured stone slabs are made to look like mountains installed under trees, thus

recalling to our minds the old tribal situation.

In the coastal South, the 'serpent-dance ritual' continues to be a prestigious and compulsive procedure. It has all the old-world charm and tabu, and it is typically tribal. Known as *Nāga-maṇḍala*, it is performed not in an enclosed shrine but in the open yard consecrated for the purpose. The site becomes a shrine as long as the ritual lasts. It is usual to construct an inner pandal measuring 32' x 14' extended on all sides by several feet to accommodate a fairly large gathering: it is a tribal affair and people from neighbouring villages stream in to participate. The pandal is exquisitely decorated, and underneath the pandal the ground is

cleaned and prepared for the depiction of an exceedingly intricate, colourful and mystical serpent. The ritual becomes simple or complex in accordance with the number of 'knots' (*pavitra*) which are introduced into the coiled body of the serpent. It is simple when there are only four knots in the four quarters: it is called quarter-*maṇḍala*. It becomes more complicated when the number of knots increases to eight in eight directions: it is then called half-*maṇḍala*. Twelve knots constitute three-quarters-*maṇḍala*, and sixteen the full-*maṇḍala*. The depiction of the *maṇḍala* covers a large area, usually about twelve feet on each side. In the central portion, raised on a small mound, the seven-hooded head of the serpent is painted. The entire *maṇḍala* is drawn

in outline, filled with powdered colours (white, red, yellow green and black) and tastefully decorated.

The area covered by the *maṇḍala* is enclosed on all sides by heaps of areca-nut flowers (called in the Tulu dialect, *hingāra*)

The ritual dance is conducted by a priest who gets possessed by the serpent spirit (*Nāga-pātri*) and two musicians (*Vaidyas*) who encourage and regulate his dance by eulogies, dialogues, tauntings and narrative ballads to the accompaniment of curiously weird sounds from the percussion instrument known as *ḍakke*. The inspired steps of the dancer are strongly reminiscent of the movements of an excited serpent, and the marvellous sequence terminates in oracular consultations.

The ritual is wholly tribal, and we see here the remarkable survival of an age-old practice.

Of interest for us in this connection is the idea of a mobile and make-shift shrine. An open shrine is constituted whenever the ritual has to be gone through, and wherever the large assembly of participants can be accommodated. It is the enclosure that is religiously relevant, and not an permanent and icon-enclosing shrine. Later, the shrine got transformed into a building, a habitat for the immobile icon; and the ritual had to be watered down and adapted to suit the limitations of such a structural shrine. The tribal emphasis was on the ritual and not on the shrine, on the function rather than on the structure.

In many a religious ceremony in Indian villages, it is usual for the priest or chieftain to carry on his head a bamboo basket or box in which an image or mask of some divinity, often a goddess, is placed. The bamboo structure is rigged up as a shrine, and the image will often be wooden, roughly carved and rudely decorated. Normally, the image or mask will be kept in the headman's house or in the priest's custody; and there it receives little attention and less worship. It acquires importance only during festive occasions when it moves out into the streets to preside over the rituals. Sometimes, an image is got ready only on the eve of such celebrations, in wood, clay or cow-dung; and after the celebrations, are over it is promptly discarded. The

shrine that houses this image or mask is constructed only for the occasion. The image lodged in this make-shift and portable shrine is carried about in the village to bless the residents; it may also travel from village to village, if its sphere of influence extends to several villages. In the folk context, the notion of a structural shrine or a permanent icon was a late arrival.

Despite the settled condition of village life and persistence of folkways, the idea of a monumental shrine did not take root till after the urban impact was felt. Serpent's mobility was the dominant image in the folk religious attitudes. The spirits that animated the otherwise uneventful life in the villages, hovered round their homes and

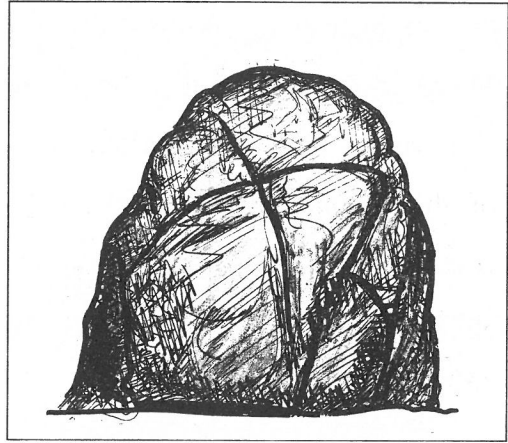
fields, moving about swiftly like breeze, without a known abode or recognizable form but entering anywhere and assuming any form. The village divinities comprehend classes of spirits called *yakshas*, *bhūtas*, *nāgas* and *gandharvas*. They could be male or female, benevolent or malevolent, charming or dreadful. They could be heroes who once lived on earth or altogether unknown to earthly existence. But they are all strictly territorial in their interest; they set limits to their own spheres of action. They extract obedience and reverence from, and undertake to guard the interests of, a specific tribe or group. They are intimately acquainted with every member of this group, and transact with him directly and materially. They manifest themselves in a variety of

uncanny objects and events, warning the devotees or guiding them.

Paradoxically enough, mountains were regarded not only as divinities but as abodes of spirits. Looking upon hills and mountains as gods is an old faith. It was current among many ancient nations, besides India. There were gods which were mountains among the Japanese ('Kami'), Chinese (Shen), Persians (Al-burz), Greeks (Olympus), Celts (Poininus), Babylonians (Enlin), Koreans and Semitics. The belief was not only universal but persistent in India. The Himālaya, Vindhya, Sahya, Malaya, Kumāra and Śrī-Śaila have been sacred from time immemorial. Several tribes (like the Muṇḍas, Santāls, Mihilis, Koravas, Kōlas, Kurumbas, Malai-panturāns

and Toḍas) even today worship hills. It is a custom among some tribes in the South (Tōḍas, Baḍagas, Sōligas and Kurumbas and others) to invoke the spirit of mountains in small stones or rocks and keep them in an honoured place within their settlements. If mountains themselves are immovable, their representative stones are mobile.

Mountains were also connected with the funeral rituals of the tribals. The dead body was dragged to the top of the mountain and left there, the background belief being the spirit of the dead soars up and resides atop the hill. Mountains were regarded with awe and wonder: they were inscrutable, majestic and mighty. Were they not the natural habitat of the spirits? If there was



Rock with irregular fissures on them worshipped as Śankaranārāyaṇa

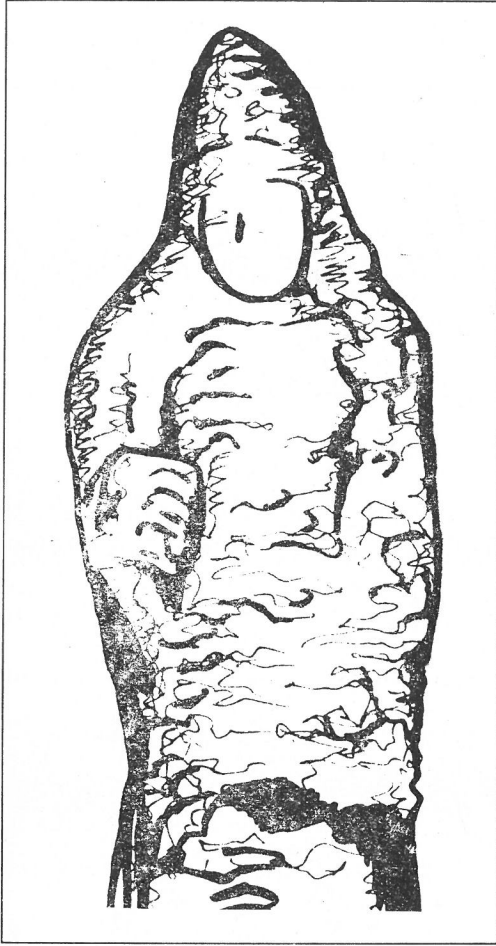
not a mountain in the neighbourhood, the tribe would form a mound of earth, or a heap of pebbles and regard it as the replica of the mountain-spirit. The religious ceremonies as well as the funeral rites would be performed in its presence. Every dead person would be marked in a pebble that would be added to the heap. Symbolising the deceased ancestors by stones and pebbles is current even among

the sophisticated groups in India. There is also the folk practice of throwing a pebble in the direction of the mountain, after the funeral rites are over: it is symbolic of the spirit flying to the mountain, its natural habitat.

This is the obvious origin of *linga* worship in our country. Fanciful theories of its sexual symbolism will be discussed later; but it may be mentioned here in passing that they are unwarranted so far as the genesis of *linga*-worship is concerned. The *linga* is merely the miniature mountain. A look at the ancient specimens of *linga* would convince anyone of the monumental significance attached to the *linga*-idea. Further, the ant-hill was also regarded as a mountain in miniature.

The *linga* tended to assume the form of the ant-hill. We have already mentioned that the worship of ant-hills goes on in many shrines in South India. Consider, in this context, the association of serpents with mountains, and of spirits with serpents. Iconographically, *linga* and the serpent-motif have frequently been integrated.

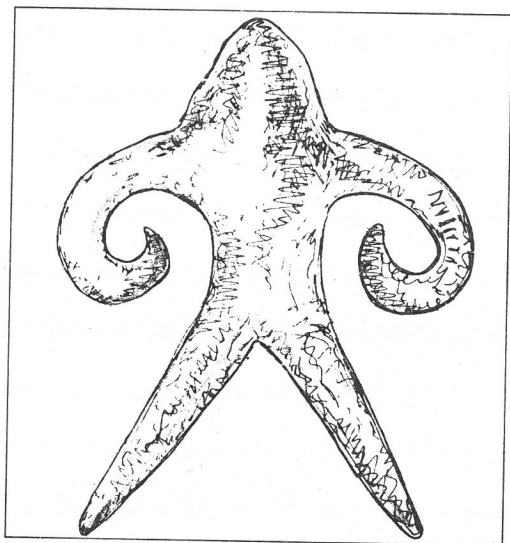
The shrine in the sacred enclosure is itself a symbol of the mountain. The tree and the mountain represent two directions of extension. The tree flows out and extends around; the hidden roots are below and the spreading branches are above. The mountain, on the other hand, closes in as it rises up: it is the inverted tree that the later literature speaks of. This dual



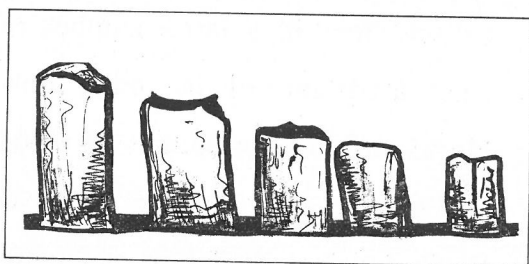
A conical rock on which the rough outline of a human form has been sculpted. It is worshipped as the iconic representation of Śiva. But it is in the temple dedicated to the Sun-god in the Belthangaḍi taluk of South Kanara.

representation is found even in the Indus-valley seals. The sophisticated temple of later times has its *vimāna* in the nature of a mountain peak or a mound, and the *gopura* that soars up; and it has its own tribal tree. A Śaiva *āgama* speaks of the ant-hill as the mountain, and the serpent with its hood whipped up as the tree. The *linga* is the mountain, the seven hooded serpent that rises above it from behind is the tree.

It would seem outrageous to be told that in a large number of celebrated shrines in India, only blocks of stone or stumps of wood are worshipped. But the fact can hardly be denied. The most famous Viśvanātha-*linga* in Vārāṇasī is just a stone picked up (of course in an

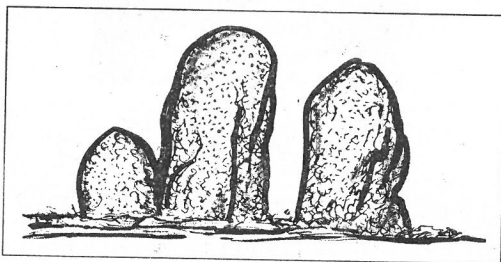


An enigmatic figure fashioned in copper found in the Gangetic plain. It is dated about 1000 B.C. The ideas of the mountain and the tree are cleverly incorporated here.



Five stones of odd shapes representing Pañcha-lingas in the temple at Bārkūr in Karnataka. They are collectively worshipped as Pañcha-lingeśvara

age of untold antiquity) from the river-bed of Narmada; and so is the Mahākāla-linga in Ujjain, whose glory is sung by Kālidāsa. The lingas worshipped in the great temples of Kāñchi-puram and Rāmeśvaram are hardened heaps of sand (*saikata*). The popular Baidyanāth shrine contains as its main image an uncarved block of granite. The Narasimha images in several well-known hill-temples of the South are mere rocks, sometimes with gaping slits in them, or rude pillars with marks of conch and discus on them.



The Śāstā stones on the Chārmāḍi mountains of the coastal ghāṭs. They represent the hill-deity Śāstā or Ayyappan

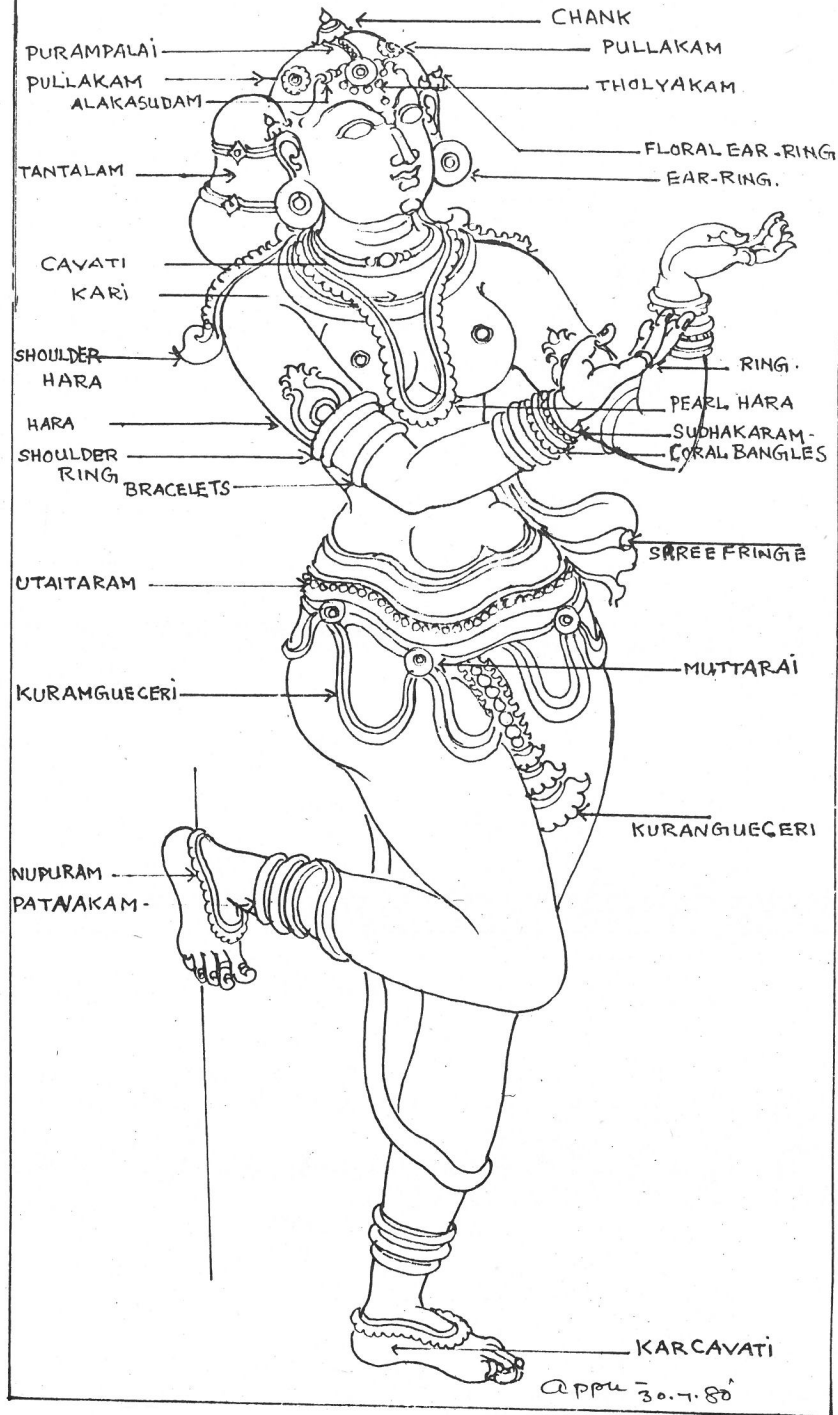


*Rock worshipped as Narasimha
in Ganganāḍu*

The Jagannātha group of images in the famous Puri temple are wooden blocks, roughly carved. The Devī in the Kāmākhyā temple is a boulder with a crevice in it. Examples could be multiplied to show that the public relevance of shrine depends not on its iconographic stylization but on its folk character. It is important to recognize that shrines have existed long before craftsmen learnt to build temples. Images have been

worshipped even when texts were not there to prescribe their forms.

The mountain idea is also involved in another detail that we find in the present-day temples. The main image, in stone or wood, is described as ‘unmoving’ (*achala* or *dhruva*): it is likened to a mountain (known in Sanskrit as *achala*), or to the roots of a tree. It does not move out of the sanctum; it is hidden in the sanctum. For processions and for use on festive occasions, another image, usually a metallic one, is employed. This is called ‘moving’ (*chala*) or processional (*utsava*) image. This latter icon derives its appeal only from the ‘un-moving’, mountainous image in the sanctum, whose strength is due to its cultic association.



CHAPTER IV

MOTHER GODDESSES AND MINOR SPIRITS

Anthropologists (like Ehrenfels) have taken pains to enumerate tribals and 'backwards' in India who are given to the cult of mother-goddesses. They do not know, however, that the cult is not confined to these groups: it is equally prevalent, and is more deep-rooted, among the sophisticated classes also. The appeal of this cult in our country has been universal and has had an unbroken career atleast from the days of Indus Valley civilization to our own day.

There may be some truth in the claim that the cult had its origins in the primitive agricultural matriarchate, for we do find that

matriarchal societies in ancient Syria, Asia Minor and Egypt encouraged this cult. It may also be true that pastoral economy tends to denigrate mother-goddesses and emphasize male divinities. But it would be wrong to assume that the cult is entirely determined by such considerations. There may be more fundamental and intensely psychological factors in the individual as well as the society in India in the background of this cult. For it has had a remarkable survival. We know for certain that numerous relics found in Mohenjodāro and Harappa suggest strongly the presence of this cult so long ago.

The talk about the male-domination of the Vedic pantheon and the pastoral economy of the Vedic people cannot obscure the significant involvement in many hymns of *Rg Veda* of the cultic ideas relating to the mother-goodness. There can be little doubt that the cult continued vigorously during the days when the major portion of the Vedic hymns were composed.

The cult of the mother-goddess has thus prevailed in India throughout its social and religious history, although its prevalence has been more pronounced in rural regions than in the urban in recent years. The Tāntrik complex of folk magical rites and esoteric exercises is what has given shape and life to this cult. The Tantra being folk is



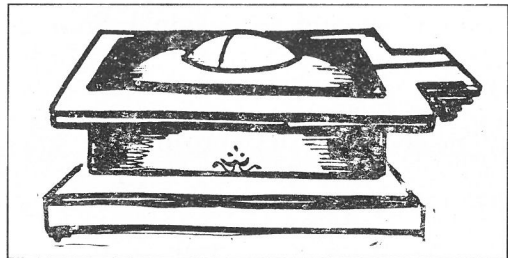
A representation of the main deity Jagannātha in the famous temple at Puri (Orissa). It is carved out of a wooden log and left entirely in the folk style. The image is renewed periodically.

largely materialistic in its orientation; its expectations are concrete benefits concerning different aspects of daily life, such as health, wealth, security, safety, eminence and efficiency. However, it should not be imagined that the Tantra was one homogenous

or unified system, uniformly applicable to the entire population. The Tāntrik approach emphasizes tribal distinctions and group-affiliations. It accommodates within its fold numerous cults and regional practices. The thread that runs through all the cults and practices is the belief in the female principle as the source of energy and affluence. Call it a fertility idea, but there it is, deeply rooted in the individual consciousness as well as in the collective unconscious.

There is no denying that the Tantra involves some eroticism. All folk practices and beliefs do incorporate the mystery of the sex act. It is not only in India that it is so, for do we not hear about the Greek Bacchanalia, the Roman

Saturnalia, the French *Fetes des Fous* and the May Day Carnivals? The Tantra is realistic, and seeks not only to translate the mysterious into the factual, but idealizes the actual. The woman in the Tantra is the mother, the matrix, the embryo, the source of all things, the essence of fertility. It is the productive sex that the Tantras speak of, and not the hedonic sex.



A representation of Mūkāmbikā in the famous shrine at Kollūr on the Western ghats. It is a lingam-like stone with a glistening vein running along it.

The biological principle of reproduction is elevated into the



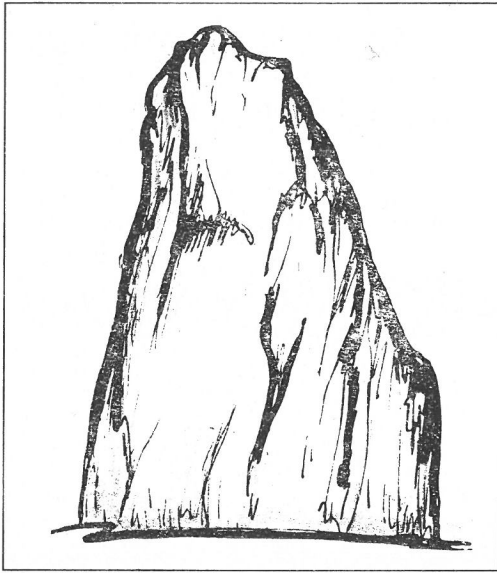
Durgā devī image in the temple of Kadri. It is a boulder on which the form of the goddess is carved in rough outline.

cosmic concept of Vaginal Source (*yoni*). The earth, the tree, the serpent and the mountain are different expressions of this cosmic urge to reproduce. The male and the female are interchangeable concepts in this context. The mountain could be the male principle; it is symbolised in the *linga*, in the ant-hill, in the altar, in the stone block or wooden pillar in

the sanctum. But it is the abode of the mother-goddess and is identified with her.

Most of the Devī shrines in India are located on mountain-tops; and even when they are located on the plains their association with the mountains is not forgotten. The word 'Durgā' itself means a mountain. Mountain is a fortress: it protects the hamlet and its neighbourhood. We have numerous mother-goddess shrines which are regarded as essential for the protection of the township: Ambā of Amber and Karṇimātā of Bikaner (Rājasthān), Śāmaleśvarī of Sambhalpur (Orissa), Arbud-mātā of Mt-Abu, Pāṇdevī of Patnā and Gayeśvarī of Gayā (Bihār), Jwālāmukhī in Kāngrā (Punjab), Kālī of Calcutta, and Chāmuṇḍī of Mysore (Karnāṭaka)

are illustrations of this aspect of the mother-goddess. Vindhyavāsinī and Vana-durgā are characteristically mountain-deities.

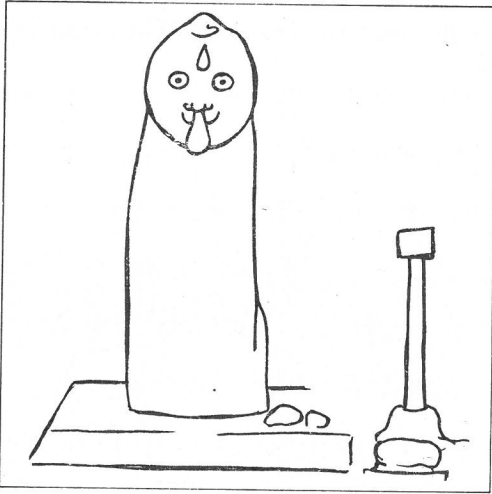


*The rock resembling an anthill,
worshipped as Durgā-devī
in a temple in Chitrāpur*

In the Tāntrik symbolism, the isosceles triangle which is the linear representation of the mountain when its apex is upward and of the tree when its apex is downward, stands

for the mother-goddess. The triangle as it stands on its base is male, while the triangle that hangs down from its apex is female. The cultic practice is to employ in worship the two triangles as interlocked denote their union, thus signifying not so much the sex act as the principle of impregnation, the metaphysical principle of *māyā* or creatrix of phenomenal reality. *Māyā* is another name of Durgā. The two triangles interlocked stand for the union of mountain and tree, the sky and the earth (*dyāvā-prthivī*).

The association of the mother-goddess with the tree is likewise widely known. The association stems from the earth-goddess (nude Gaurī) becoming the deity filled with plants (*Śākambharī*), symbolising harvest in



The folk deity represented on a wooden post. It is worshipped as Kambheśvari which means 'the lady of the pillar.' It is in a temple in Askā (Orissa)

the agricultural context. She is the germinal, productive principle (Prakṛti), and is found represented in the Indus seals and praised in the Vedic hymns. Red is the colour associated with procreation, and the mother-goddess is conceived of as red in complexion all over. Her association with red is again an ancient one. We find among the Mohenjo-dāro relics figurines of the

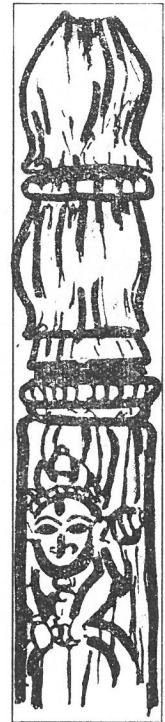
mother-goddess painted red. The association continues even today in many forms: blood, Kumkum, red hibiscus flowers, red berries, red garments and so on are said to be dear to this goddess. She is the principle of abundant growth, proliferation and progeny. She is therefore worshipped in trees (such as Kadamba, Nimba and Aśoka), in nine plants or leaves (*nava-patrikā*, a ritual in Durgā-pūjā), in creepers (such as *aparājītā*), in grains (rice and barley), in an earthen pot of water covered with mango-leaves (*ghaṭa* or *kumbha*), in a coconut smeared with vermilion, or in a linear diagram (like *Śrī-yantra* or *Sarvato-bhadra-maṇḍala*).

In the folk mind, the male and female principles were distinct. The male (Śiva) is only an indication or

sign (which is the actual meaning of the word *linga*) of the presence and power of the female (Śakti). The male is no doubt likened to the ploughman while the female is the field that produces wealth. But it is also true that the male is inertia whereas the female is energy. Tantra does not make an absolute distinction between them. Its outlook is that the female includes the male. The female is complete in herself, and projects the male whenever needed. Thus the idea of the mother-goddess does not militate against the notion of male divinities, but comprehends it. It is significant that the female principle is represented by a circle (*chakra*) and the male by the central point (*bindu*) in it. One of the finds from the Harappan excavations depicts the goddess

upside side and a tree (male) issuing from her vagina.

This is how the ancient representations of the mother-goddess have also been in lingas, rocks, ant-hills and altars. Mūkāmbikā in Kollūr (Karnāṭaka) is a linga, as many other Devī shrines in India. The Kāmākhyā shrine in Assam contains a rock which has a crevice in it (resembling the vagina or *yonī*), and which is smeared with red ochre. The Durgamma of Bellary is only an ant-hill. Shashti is worshipped in Bengal by the village



*Kambhesvari,
the pillar
deity
worshipped
in a shrine in
Gandhardi
(Orissa).*



The main deity inside the Vaitāl temple in Bhubaneśvar (Orissa). It is worshipped as Chāmuṇḍā

pillars symbolising the deity. There is a Khambeśvarī post near Gandhardi (Orissa), which is an wooden pillar on which a deity is rudely carved.

The village shrines of the mother-goddess are usually small conical stones which would have turned black by a continuous application of oil. Often we find squarish stone-pillars representing mother-goddesses on a raised platform underneath a tree or in the open field; there may also be narrow enclosures, but rarely anything like a temple. If the mother-goddess acquires a little celebrity, the stone pillar may be housed in a thatched shed. The village goddess Māramma, causing and curing epidemics, may be a mere stump of the margosa

folk by installing a stone under a jack-tree; they also carry cowrie-shells as amulets symbolising the mother-goddess. The Khoṇḍ temple in the Phulbāni district (Orissa) has only an wooden post which is worshipped as the goddess. The Khambeśvarī temple at Aska (also in Orissa) has two short wooden

tree (considered especially sacred to her); the village carpenter may attempt to turn the top of the stump into a shape resembling the head. Boundary stones demarcating the village area or the tribal zone would themselves be looked upon as goddesses (Ellammā). Odd-looking stones on the tank-beds, beside the village well, near the entrance to the village or at cross-roads, would represent the village goddesses.

More usual, however, is to fashion a clay image once a year or oftener, place it under a pandal constructed for the purpose, worship it as the goddess with folk rites, and dismiss it promptly after the worship. There will be no permanent shrine in the village, but there would be an enclosure reserved for the erection of the pandal whenever

occasion demands. Village goddesses in South India like Mutyāamma, Ankamma, Gangamma, Doḍḍamma (Maheśvari), Pūjamma and Peddamma are all made in clay, housed in temporary shrines and worshipped. Their presence and relevance are specific to the situation. Here the folk rituals are more important than the icons or the shrines. And the entire community participates in the rituals. Each village would have its own village goddess, called *grāma-devatā* in the South and *Ṭhākuraṇī* in the North. They would generally be housed under trees in the most frequented area of the village. It is usual to call them Ūamma (the goddess of the village).

Mother-goddesses are generally associated with epidemics

like Cholera (Māriamma in the South, Mōṭi-mātā in Central India, and Mārī-bhavāni), plague (Bombaimāyī in the Gayā district, Oḷai-Chaṇḍī in Bengal, Peddamma, Aṇṇamma, Nūkalamma, Maridiyamma and Kokkālamma in South India), small-pox and measles (Mutyālamma, Sukhājamma and Uddālamma). In their curative capacity they are collectively termed Pīḍārī ('enemies of distress'). They may also cause ailments, if not properly propitiated. Their terrible aspect as well as the fierce rituals connected with their worship (like animal sacrifices, hook-swinging and fire-walking) may strike terror and inspire repugnance in the hearts of the sophisticated people, but the rural folk are happy with them, because they fulfil an important

function in their individual and collective life.

Early images of the mother-goddess were of course rough and ready. They betray bold turns of rustic imagination. Oftentimes only the head is delineated, and the torso is left merely a stump to be draped with garments and adorned by necklaces; there would be no arms and legs. Later, when the impact of stylized iconography was felt, the full human figure was represented. Wood was the material commonly employed, and the carving was rough. It was usual for arms to be attached later. There was no distinction as yet between the permanent and fixed image in the sanctum (*chala* or *dhruva*) and the processional image. The same image

was in the sanctum and was also carried about. Sometimes huge clay images were also made and richly painted over; they were of course immoveable, and small wooden replicas were used for processions.

Whatever the material the image was made of, the aspect was carefully rendered awesome and terrible. The background idea was not that she was cruel, but that she was looked upon as the protectress from all evil, ailment, danger and death. She should frighten away the hordes of misfortune and disease, the enemies, and spells of the sorcerers. She is represented as trampling over the enemy or the personified evil, and wielding a sword to subjugate the undesirable elements. She was, in the tribal

context, the burning fire itself: fire-walking ceremony is a device to placate her. She rides on a lion and vanquishes the wild buffalo imagined as a demon. She brooks no slackness in the observances that the tribal law prescribes, and she can strike the erring devotee as severely as she does the offending enemy. Kālī, Karālī, Chāmuṇḍā, Chhinna-mastā, Ugra-tārā are her fierce aspects. She is also featured as peaceful and benign.

Her shrine was indicated by images of crouching lions in front of it or on the roof of it. Even in the later sophisticated temples, the lion motif survived and was stylized. The association of the mother-goddess with the lion is not only ancient but was widespread. We

have a Sumerian cylinder-seal, belonging to about 2250 B.C., which depicts a mother-goddess (a version of our Durgā) with a lion.

Mother-goddesses begin their career in a cultic fashion. Each village or tribal settlement will have its own mother-goddess, inspired by a local legend and oftentimes an incarnation of some local woman of exceptional virtue, valour or evil nature. Self-sacrifice or self-immolation to help construction of village tanks and wells, to eliminate pestilence, to repulse an attack or to vindicate the honour of the tribe, would usually elevate an otherwise ordinary woman to a divine status; and a shrine would be erected to her memory. But soon romantic legends would grow round the simple memorial shrine and push

the prosaic historical details to the background and later into oblivion. She would be known in course of time only as a goddess. Mīnākshī of Madhurai is an illustrious instance, but there are thousands of other shrines in the country with a similar background. Many cultic divinities like Vāsavī (Kanyā-kumāri), Mānasā and Draupadī have a similar origin.

Multiplicity of mother-goddesses is a folk fact. But their names and forms have remarkable similarity; legends also are in the main the same, barring local touches and finer details. This was capitalized by the later sophisticated religion to formulate the concept of one Mother whose manifestations were innumerable. Thus the mother-goddess had a local relevance as

well as a general significance. Originally an earth-goddess, symbolising fertility, she came to be named Ma or Amma. The word is not a Sanskrit one, nor is entirely Indian. The Amma of the *Austrics*, *Ummu* of the Sumerians, *Umm* of the Accadians, *Ommo* of the Scythians are cognate with the Indian *Amma* or *Uma*. There was a goddess with the same name in Persian gulf, Red Sea area and Asia Minor. She is the mother with the mystic form, the queen of the earth and its vegation, the lady who befriended and ruled over animals (especially bull and lion), the protectress of fortresses, and inhabiting mountains, glens and forests.

What happens to the humans when they are dead, and gone from

here? Do they disappear altogether into airy nothings? Man's instinct to survive fights against this conclusion. The folk mind naively postulates the survival of all human beings beyond death and independent of the physical body. Especially is this true of human beings who are distinguished by their magical power, social status, valour and victories, or by their very wicked dispositions. They live on to guard over the tribe or clan, or to haunt it. The members of the group have to keep them in good humour, to involve them in tribal affairs, and to placate them by periodical propitiations. They are *pretas* or 'departed' spirits who nevertheless continue to interest themselves in all undertakings of the individual and the group. They are *bhūtas* or 'potent' spirits who have

acquired power enough to help or haunt those who are living.

Later, a distinction was made between the merely 'departed' spirits who hover round the place of their burial or cremation, unable to tear themselves off their material background (the *pretas*), and the 'potent' spirits who by their accomplishments while living and the manner of their death can come to the aid of the living whenever invoked (the *bhūtas*). But the folk mind does not make this fine distinction. *Bhūta* is a more generic term, comprehensive and significant. However, it is distinguished from ghosts which are obviously and completely wicked and mischievous (the *piśāchas* in Sanskrit and *kule* in Tulu); they are vengeful and the

living seek to keep them off. They are the spirits of those who lived and died violently, despised while living and dreaded when dead. They correspond to demons and devils.

The spirits that are worshipped in the folk cults are the *bhūtas*, and not *piśāchas*. Therefore, to describe the cultic worship prevalent in the Himālayan regions, and in the western coast of Southern India (Tulu-nāḍu and Keraḷa) 'devil-worship' or 'demon-worship', as is usually done, is altogether inappropriate. The *bhūtas* (also called *daivas*, although a subtle distinction is sometimes made between the two) are actually supernatural agents aiding the clan-members to live harmoniously, peacefully, effectively and

meaningfully. They are in fact divinities with a human past and tribal interest. They guide the folk on the right path, establish social justice, and preserve the tribal sanctions with scrupulous and strict supervision. They are sought after by the clan-members and even by others who are outside the clan.

The rites in connection with their invocation and worship are not to be regarded as black magic or witchcraft. They are never invoked to do any harm, but always to help normal living. It is true that the masks and the images representing the *bhūtas* are terror-striking; the priest when possessed by the *bhūta* conducts himself in a manner that is frightening and bizarre. But the participants of the personating ritual

(called *darśana* or the 'appearance' of the spirit) find the whole event meaningful and satisfying. The element of dread or violence does not enter into their transaction. It is a part of their normal living.

Life has many aspects: problems, stresses, challenges, dangers, risks and pleasures. If Vedic religion personified and deified natural forces, folk religion personified and defied normal aspects of human life. The spirits represent the manifold aspects of normal life, both domestic and social, in the rural and tribal context. Animals play an important role in such a life, especially if the village or the tribal settlement is in the close vicinity of forests and mountains. The spirits thus come to

share both human and animal traits. There are spirits that eliminate the dangers from animals such as wild buffalo (Durgā in her aspect of Mahishāsura-mardinī), tiger (Pili-chāmuṇḍi), snakes (Manasā, Jāngulī), and elephant (Vināyaka, Bālājī and Ayyappan). Some ride on animals suggesting subjugation, like Durgā on lion, Śiva on the wild bull, Kuṭṭi-chāttan on buffalo, and Ayyappan on tiger.

Some spirits incorporate in themselves the form of animals they eliminate or subjugate. Folk deities are mostly of this nature. Gaṇeśa (the elephant-headed god), Hanumān (the monkey-headed demi-god), Varāha (the boar-faced form of Vishṇu), Hayagrīva (the horse-headed god, corresponding to the

tribal Jarandāye), Garuḍa (the hawk-headed demi-god), Nāga and Nāginī (the god or goddess having human form above with serpentine hoods, and serpentine form below), Narasimha (the lion-faced form), and Nandi (the bull-headed demi-god attached to Śiva) are illustrations of this folk phenomenon. Strangely, many of these spirits were accepted by the sophisticated religion either as divinities in their own right or attached to one of the two major Gods, Vishṇu or Śiva, as incarnations, attendants or offsprings.

When, however, this is done, there is an elevation in their functional status, a reinterpretation of their role and nature, and a stylization of their form. At the folk

level, it is a simple process of fusion of human and animal traits, an expression of the relation between the spirit and the animal. When we see in many folk shrines animal forms in wood or metal receiving worship, we are likely to mistake the act as zoolatry. The fact is that behind the animal-icon is the spirit-idea. It is not the animal as such that receives adoration, but the spirit that has assumed that form. The worship of Pañjurli (the pig-shaped spirit), Mahisandāye (the buffalo-spirit), Jarandāye (the horse-spirit), Nandigōṇe (the bull-spirit), Puliteyyam (the tiger-spirit), Nāga-kanye (the serpent-damsel) in the western coastal regions of South India is certainly not an instance of zoolatry, nor is it a totemistic cult. It is full-fledged and mature religion at the folk level.



Representation of Śiva as Bhairava in the Vaitāl temple of Bhubaneśvar. Bhairava in the terrible form of Śiva, frequently met with in the tribal context as a bhūta

The worship of mountain-spirits (*yakshas*), sylvan spirits (*nāgas*), and spirits of community heroes or saviours (*bhūtas*) has been in India continuous from the earliest stages of Indian civilization till our own day. There is a very large number of these spirits that inspire

reverence among the rural and tribal folk.

Most of them, however, are local and have frequently been subordinated to the gods of the more sophisticated and urbanized religion.

Some among the folk spirits have retained their original and universal appeal notwithstanding their incorporation into later and sophisticated religion. Gaṇeśa is the most conspicuous example. There is hardly any doubt that he began his career as a *yaksha*, and that he is essentially a folk deity, both in his form and in his function. He was later brought into the urban fold as a member of Śiva's household (as his son), but his importance has persisted without any diminution. It



The popular folk-spirit of Kerala, Kuṭṭi-chāttan, frequently invoked in magical rites and by sorcerers

is probable that at one time, his relevance was local, but it has been universal in India for at least two thousand years now. We will have occasion to consider his case in

greater detail in the next section. But it is important to recognize here his folk origin and folk nature.

Gaṇeśa iconography has been more or less unalterably crystallized since the time of the Imperial Guptas: elephantine head, corpulent body, seated in a relaxed posture having eatables in his hand. He is largely represented as male, although there are specimens of his female form (Gaṇeśani or Vaināyakī). But the early images indicate only the elephantine head, and leave the rest of the form vague. He is crudely made, often with clay, and anointed with redochre or vermillion. There was an insistence that the Gaṇeśa-image should be installed under trees, preferably under palm-trees, or in the town where four roads meet.

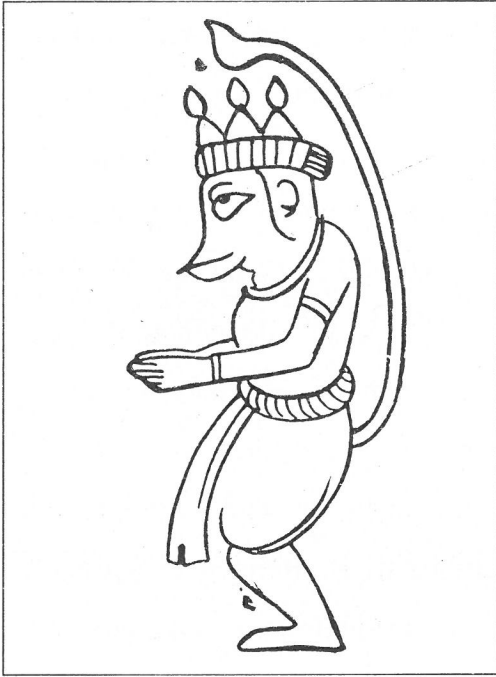
Early shrines were clearly meant to be small, flat-roofed and plain. Even when Gaṇeśa was included in the canonical texts of sculpture and architecture, his shrine was prescribed to be simple and unostentatious, his sanctum having neither doors nor a tower. In temples dedicated to Śiva or Viṣṇu he was to be accommodated only in a niche, or in an open pavilion. Large and imposing structures to Gaṇeśa were unknown until very recent years: stylized shrines dedicated solely to Gaṇeśa are also relatively uncommon. His initial inclusion in the urbanized pantheon was only as an attendant god (*pārśva-devatā*), and his mention in the Smṛiti texts is as an uncanny spirit (*yaksha*), causing and curing malevolent influences, especially the diseases of children.

If Gaṇeśa transcended his original folk character and his tribal confinement and carved out an independent status for himself, Hanumān, another obviously folk spirit, retained his role as a guardian spirit subordinated to an urbanized divinity. Although his worship is popular in all parts of the country even to this day, the mythological element has predominated in his featurization: he is a hero in *Rāmāyaṇa*, an able attendant of Rāma. He is mighty and valorous, and can destroy hordes of demons and evil spirits.

He guards villages against marauders, violent aggressors and wicked goblins. Every village will have a shrine to him at the very entrance. He is the patron-deity of

professional wrestlers who invariably invoke his aid to win their combats. He is also a favourite of the magicians and sorcerers: his name and image are frequently employed in rituals meant to secure the health and strength of children. He is also worshipped as an antidote to morbid fears and anxiety; he figures prominently in talismans and amulets worn by those who seek to become brave and confident.

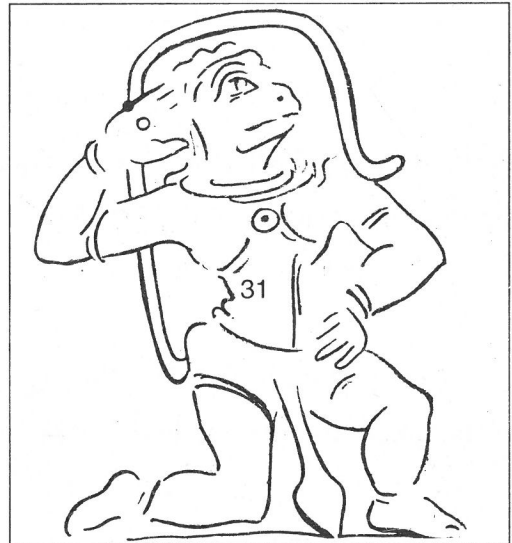
There is no doubt that he was an independent folk-spirit before his involvement with Rāma began. Early images of Hanumān highlight his grotesque form. The name Hanumān is not a regular Sanskrit word: it is the Sanskritized form of a Dravidian word meaning, 'male-monkey' (āṇ-manti). He is given not only a



Hanumān as represented in the folk-painting of Mewār (Rājasthān)

monkey-face but also the characteristic tail: his general form and posture are those of an anthropoid ape, although his hands and feet are more human. stylized iconography tended to humanize his image to a greater extent, but could not avoid the evident folk background. He is sometimes

depicted as having five heads: those of a monkey (the main one), horse, boar, tiger (or lion) and eagle (*Garuḍa* or sometimes parrot, *śuka*). Later explanation seeks to synthesize in this strange icon the images of Narasimha, Varāha, Hayagrīva and Garuḍa with that Hanumān. But preoccupation with dangers from wild animals is undoubtedly the undercurrent. It is probably an



Hanumān as a hero from Āndhra Pradesh

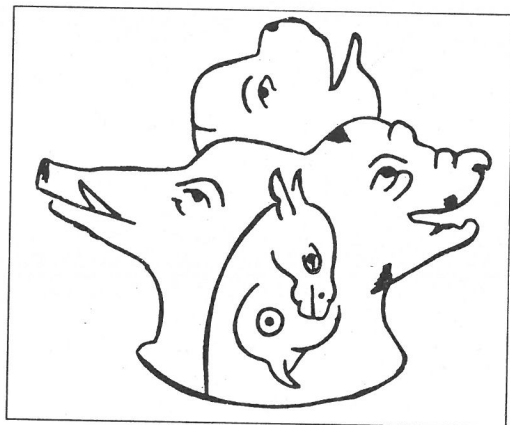


Hanumān represented as a guardian-hero

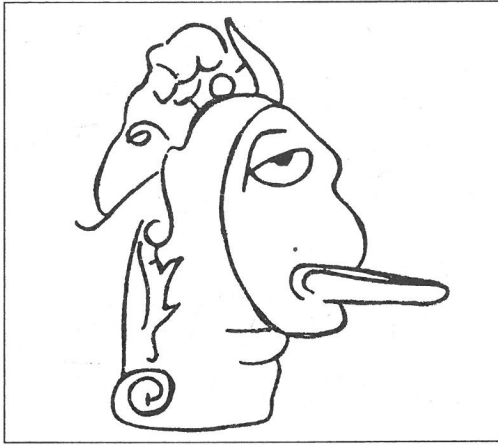
attempt to arrive at a composite figure representing five different animal-headed spirits.

Like shrines to Gaṇeśa, shrines to Hanumān are also typically small, flat-roofed and plain. It is also common to leave the stone icons uncovered by any structure. Huge

boulders rudely carved into the form of Hanumān are commonly to be met with. In the folk context, his shrine is always an independent one. But in later religion he is never regarded as an independent divinity. In the temples in which he figures as the main god, there is always the iconographic presence of his master Rāma. It is therefore usual to represent him as a devotee, with palms joined in prayer or supplication.



The Hanumān mask in metal



*Another representation of five-headed
Hanumān from Rājasthān*

Alternately, he is shown as running, carrying a mountain on his left hand, and a mace in his right. The situational reference is to an episode in *Rāmāyaṇa*. Struck by a powerful weapon on the battle-field. Lakshmaṇa fainted away. The herb to revive him was on a distant mountain. Hanumān was sent to fetch it. But unable to identify the plant, he uprooted the entire mountain and brought it to the

battle-field. The physicians took the herb and saved Lakshmaṇa's life.

Hanumān is included in North India under the general nomenclature of Bālāji. Bālāji is a very popular god in the North, inspired directly by the folk idiom. The term does not refer to any particular divinity, either locally or stylistically specified. It is a generic name. It includes several mountain spirits (*yakshas*), local tutelary deities (*devas*), deified but wild heroes (*bhūtas*), and abstract divinities. Supernatural power and extraordinary presence are the distinguishing features of Bālāji. And he comprehends all aspects of a normal divinity: he protects the village or property, he guards against ailments and attacks, he secures health and happiness, he warns the devotee and guides him.



Hanumān carrying the mountain, in a painting from Himāchala Pradesh

While he is worshipped, he is feared also. He is a friend when placated, but he can be fierce when offended.

Small shrines, plain and low, are erected in rural surroundings to him. It is interesting that the North Indians regard the famous deity on the Tirumalai Hills in Āndhra Pradesh as Bālāji, thus emphasizing the tribal background of this shrine.

Later temples, mighty and monumental, evolved from such low beginnings. Sophistication did not wipe out the folk elements: it only provided a context for them, in keeping with the new needs of the urbanized population.

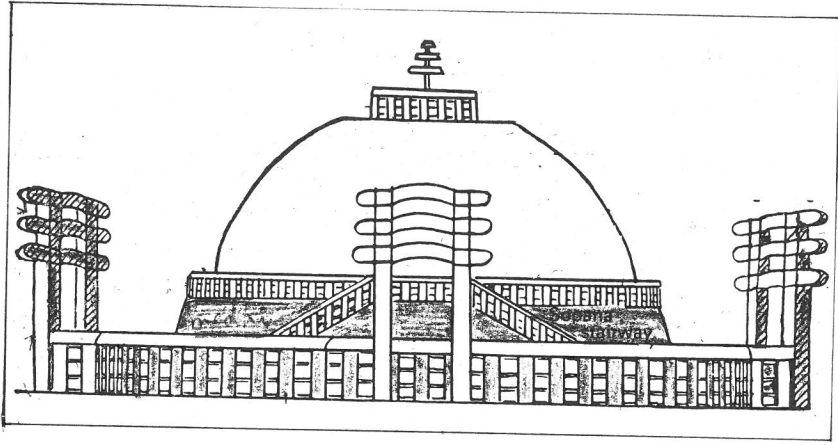
CHAPTER V

THE EVOLUTION OF TEMPLE

The caves were naturally the earliest shrines. And caves were also places where the primitive burial relics or the funerary urns were preserved. The memory of the cave-shrines lingered on in the Upanishadic 'heart-cave'. Where natural caves were not readily available, people constructed cave-like shrines. But these would obviously have been flimsy, being little more than thatched huts or bamboo-and-mud houses. Among the tribes in which this practice still survives, as among the Tōḍas, the resemblance of these shrines to natural caves is striking. We have no clues regarding their nature of appearance, for the ravages of time

have wiped them out. But the tiled, sloping and conical roofs of the temples in the west-coast may be regarded as survivals.

The stūpas are the earliest shrines on record as well as in actual evidence. The expression *stūpa* means a heap of grain or a mound of earth. As a heap of grain it was precious; and as a mound of earth it was a monument. The word is found in the *Yajurveda* in the sense of a precious monument (*Vishṇoh stūpah*). We have already referred to *agnidriya*, which was the Vedic stūpa. The building of stūpas must, therefore, have been a very ancient



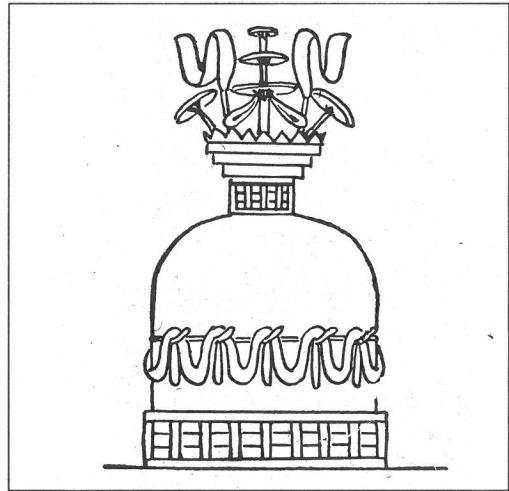
Stūpa at Sāñchi

practice. But it loomed into enormous importance during the days of Aśoka. the large number of stūpas that emperor Aśoka is said to have built have all disappeared. But the architectural form of the stūpa that was finalized during his days survived in many later stūpas, like those at Bārhut, Bodhgayā, Sārnāth and Sāñchi, which were all structures built between the first and the third centuries B.C., although they have been renovated and enlarged periodically.

This Buddhist apatation was massive hemispherical structure, filled with earth, pebbles and stone, mantled by bricks, and covered by stone slabs. It was erected on a broad circular platform (*medhi*), providing a passage for ceremonial circumambulation, and fenced by a running railing (*vedikā*). On top of this plain tumulus was a quadrangular terrace (*harmika*), over which was placed a parasol (*chhatra*) signifying spiritual sovereignty.

The area of the stūpa was enclosed by gateways (*torāṇa*) on the four sides; this enclosure derives from a tāntrik background. The real significance of the stūpa lies in the *mana*-articles that it contains. The technical expression for the stūpa is *dhātu-garbha* (the original for the Sinhalese 'dagoba'), which means 'the womb of the relic'. The relic may be the physical remains of a great man of spiritual strength, such as his bones, tufts of hair, or nail pairings (*śārīrika*), or articles that he had used such as his robes, begging bowl, or a piece of his staff (*pāribhogika*), symbols of high attainment like the wheel, the triple-gem or a miniature stūpa itself (*uddesika*). The introduction of such relics into the body of the stūpa is accompanied by magical rituals. The

square enclosure facing the four quarters is meant to contain and intensify the power of this relic; it guards the relic from the intrusion of distracting and inimical forces. The maṇḍala form of a circle contained within a square with openings on four sides is concretized in the stūpa.

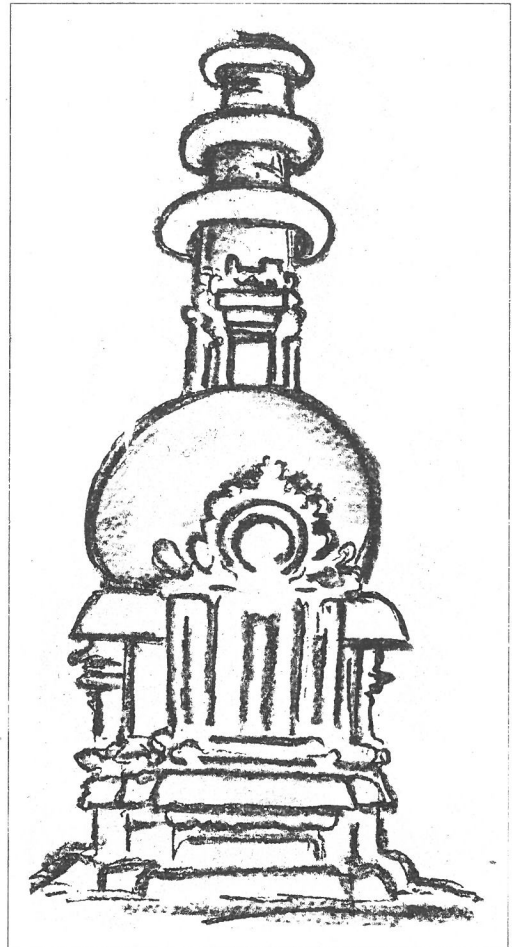


Stūpa-carving, Amaravāti Stūpa

The relic is thus the essence of the stūpa. The stūpa is also called the 'egg' (*aṇḍa*) as it contains the

‘relic-seed’ within. The funeral tumulus is in a very real sense a magical monument. The wealth of sculptural representations involved in the gateways and pilasters are to be regarded as essentially mystical in character and purpose. While there are narrative sculptures depicting the main events in the Buddha’s life, most of the carvings have a magical purpose. Sometimes, folk sprites and goblins (*yakshas* and *yakshiṇīs*) are also represented, for the same purpose.

There is a measure of truth in the saying that a Hindu Temple is a successor to the Buddhist stūpa. But it is not readily recognised that the Buddhist stūpa itself is a successor to the Vedic stūpa, which can be traced back to the cave-



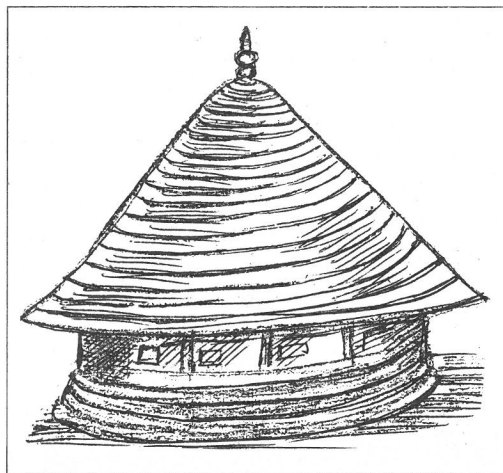
shrines. The Buddhist stūpa is as magical in its intent as the Vedic stūpa was, and it involved rituals even as the latter did, although of a different kind.

It was G. Jouveau - Dubreuil (*Vedic Antiquities*, 1922) who first noticed the fact that the stūpa was derived from the 'vedic tomb', as he, wrongly however, translated the expression 'agnidriya'. Agnidriya is a hemispherical, hollow enclosure in close imitation of the wood and bamboo hut of the chieftain. It contained a central shaft, after the pillar of the hut sustaining the hemispherical dome made of timber



Bhūta-Shrine

and clay. This was the chimney of the Agnidriya; and this was the fore runner of the 'harmikā' of the stūpa. The enclosure also had two seats on either side for the performance of Agni and Soma sacrifices.



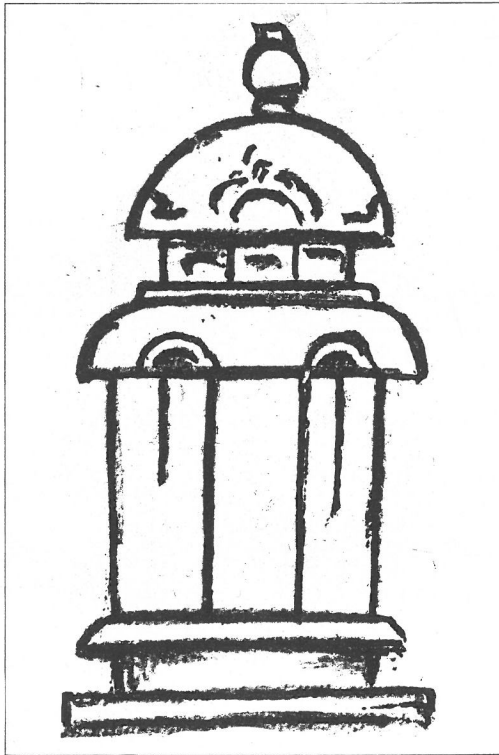
In a very real sense, the temple traditions are a continuation of the Vedic approach to divinity. The temple is but a later version of the sacrificial pavilion of the Vedic times (yajña-śālā), where spiritual, ritual, social and educational purposes of

the individuals and the community were together served. It represents, as the Vedic pavilion did, unity of the groups of people who lived in the locality, and harmony in their aspirations and approaches. The worship done in a temple by the priests is reminiscent of the sacrificial session. It is to actualize and placate a deity, by making offerings, even as the yajña was. And in many temples, fire-rituals are a daily routine; and in all of them fire-rituals become grand affairs on occasions. The Vedic fire is represented by the light that continues to glow all the time (nandā-dīpa). In the sequences of worship in a temple Vedic hymns continue to be recited, along with paurāṇic verses. The sequences themselves (called upachāras) recall

the Vedic convention of treating the deity like an honoured human guest: welcoming (avāhana), providing a seat (āsana), offering water to wash ones feet and sip (pādya, āchamana) and so on. In the temple, the deity is accorded even royal honours (rājopachāra), and is taken out on a grand procession (utsava). This reminds one of the 'Āpri-sūktas' in *Rgveda*. Iconography of our deities also is derived from the Vedic descriptions of divinities.

It is incorrect, therefore, to imagine that the temple represents a movement outside the Vedic fold, or that it is anti-vedic in its approach. The earliest temples belong to the Vaikhānasa tradition, and it is well-known that the Vaikhānasas are staunch Vedic protagonists.

They insist on employing only Vedic hymns in all the sequences of worship in a temple, and on the performance of prescribed fire-rituals in the temple, and also in the household of the priests. Their scriptures rely heavily on 'Kalpa-sūtras', which are in the direct line of Vedic tradition.



Stylistically, the structure of the temple originates from the Vedic stūpa, and functionally, the enclosure of a temple is a survival of the Vedic sacrificial arena (yajña-śālā). We see here a continuation of the Vedic tradition, with of course periodical changes occasioned by historical and social circumstances.

Another innovation that was chronologically parallel to the Buddhist stūpas was the excavated caves like those of Junnār (one hundred and fifty caves, near Poona, about 100 A.D.), Kṛṣṇagiri or Kanherī (eight caves, near Bombay, about 150-189 A.D.), Ajaṇṭā (about twenty-seven caves, the first few centuries after Christ) and Ellorā (about thirty-three caves, about 550-750 A.D.). These caves were

excavated from hard, living rocks on the faces of hills. They were elaborately carved and richly ornamented by pillars, arches and pierced windows. These excavated caves, however, were more in the nature of retreats and settlements for monks and hermits than shrines in the strict sense of the term. They were far removed from the austere and simple cave-shrines, both in design and purpose. Even though they had a shrine area containing either a stūpa image or a Buddha icon, the major portion of the excavated cave was utilized for the assembly hall, habitation cells, porch, and the verandah. These caves were meant to be ornate and architectural monuments. There was more of the art in them than of the

shrine. Here is an instance of the image dominating the icon.

The significance of these cave-sanctuaries is that the simple shrine was fast becoming a public institution, where people gathered not only to offer worship but to meet monks and listen to their discourses. The sacred calling of the residents of these cave-monasteries had now secular involvements. Sects developed, affiliations began, and the shrine element was minimized.

It is not to be imagined that the cave-shrines were the only kind of shrines that prevailed during those days. There must have been numerous shrines constructed of perishable material like wood, clay and bricks. For, an inscription of the

Pallava King Mahendravarman I (600-630 A.D.) refers to them and suggests that this king was the innovator of the rock-cut shrines. This inscription, found at Mandagapattu in South Arcot, claims that this king, who was celebrated as 'Vichitra-chitta' ('one whose mind was ingenious'), got constructed a shrine for Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu without the employment of bricks, timber, metals or mortar:

एतदनिष्टकमद्रुमलो-
हमसुधं विचित्रचित्तेन ।
निर्मापितन्तृपेण ब्रम्हे -
श्वरविष्णुलक्षितायतनम् ॥

We are not sure if he was the first person to conceive the idea of stone-temples, for the stone-temples of Banavāsi and Tālaguṇḍa in Karnāṭaka were several centuries

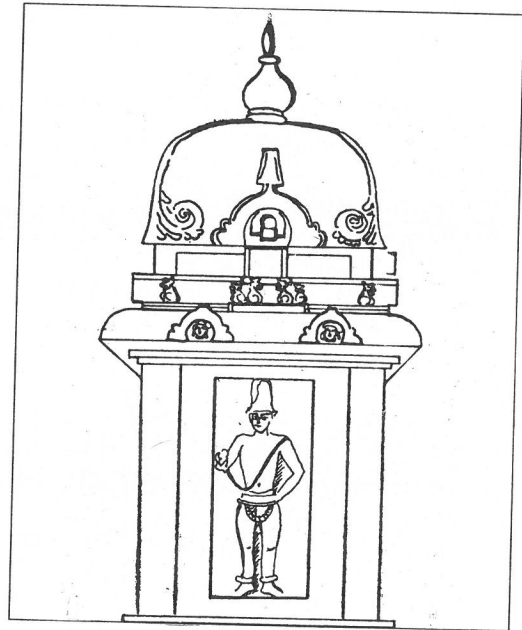
earlier. But, true to his title, this king Mahendravarman was versatile. He was not only a patron of the great Sanskrit poet Bhāravi, but was himself an author. His Sanskrit farce *Mattavilāsa-prahasana* has come down to us. He appears to have come under the influence of the celebrated Śaiva saint Appar, and built many shrines to Śiva. In fact, he bore another title *Chetṭakāri* ('builder of temples'). Numerous temples in and around Kāñchīpuram, Pallāvaram, Vallam, Māmandūr and Tirukkaḷukunram have been ascribed to him. The original structure of the famous Ekāmrānātha temple in Kāñchīpuram appears to have been commissioned by him.

But it was his successor, Narasimhavarman I (630-668 A.D.)

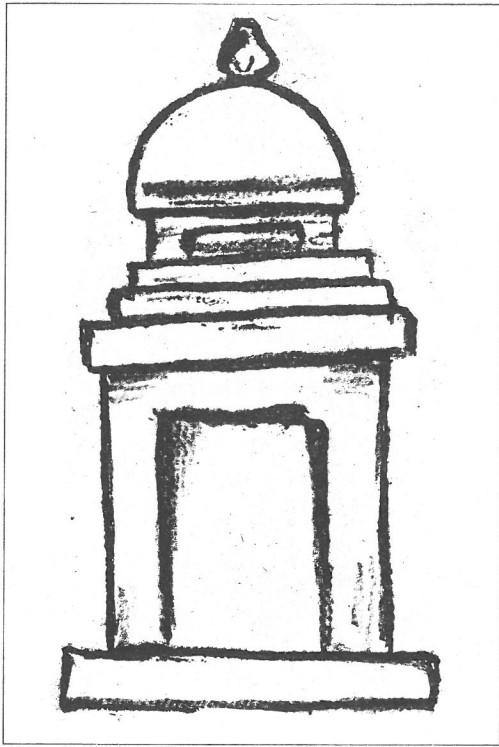
who built the world-famous five monolithic shrines on the sea-shore in Māmallapuram, near Madras. He bore the title 'Māmalla' ('the great fighter'), after which the township was named. Each of these shrines has been cut out of a granite boulder and shaped into a free-standing temple. This answers to the description of the 'Ratha' style of temples in the classical texts.

Ratha ordinarily means a vehicle, but its etymological import is to 'play and enjoy' (*ramu krīḍāyām*). In classical texts, of 'rathas' are distinguished: 'metrical' (*chando-maya*), where a hymn becomes a vehicle of expression; 'divine' (*deva-maya*), where a structure becomes a habitation of gods, a pleasure-resort for them;

'corporeal' (*deha-maya*), where the body of ours becomes a means for the conveyance of *karma*-dispositions through several lives; and 'transport' (*vāha-maya*), signifying the chariots used by kings and warriors in the battle-field. *Ṛgveda* uses the word *ratha* in all these four senses.



Ratha-carving, Māmallapuram

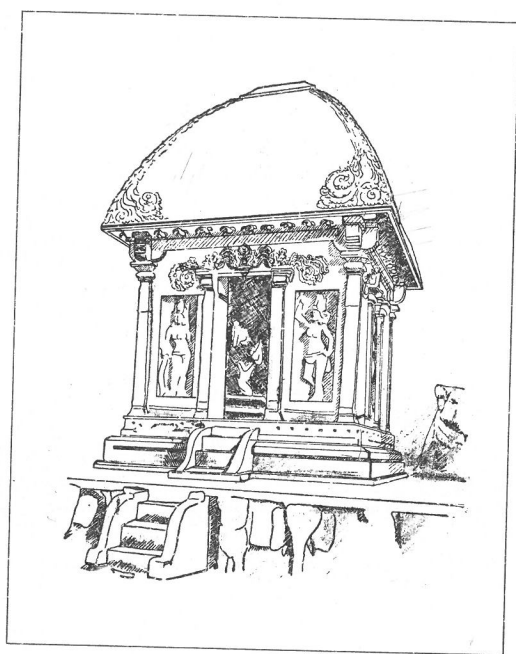


The old Indian texts of architecture take the expression to mean any solid construction for the habitation of gods, fashioned by the celestial mason *Tvashṭṛ*; they rely on the *Taittirīya-brāhmaṇa* statement “Adamantine is ratha” (*vajro vai rathah*). The ancient caste nomenclature ‘rathakāra’ signifies

not the “makers of chariots” but “the builders of temples”. it was a ‘mixed caste’ inasmuch as the work they did involved a variety of skills and a co-ordination of different professions. The five monolithic monuments in Māmallapuram were called ‘rathas’ in the sense of ‘divine habitations’ sculpted by men.

These shrines have been popularly, but fancifully, named after the Pāṇḍava heroes and their consort Draupadī. The most interesting shrine in this group is the one named after Draupadī. It is actually a shrine dedicated to the Mother Goddess. It is architecturally simple and artistically elegant. It is a one-celled shrine containing the icon of standing Durgā carved in relief. The cell on a raised platform is approached by

a flight of three steps. The opening is flanked by stylized 'door-guardians' the other sides have niches containing replicas of the icon within the cell.

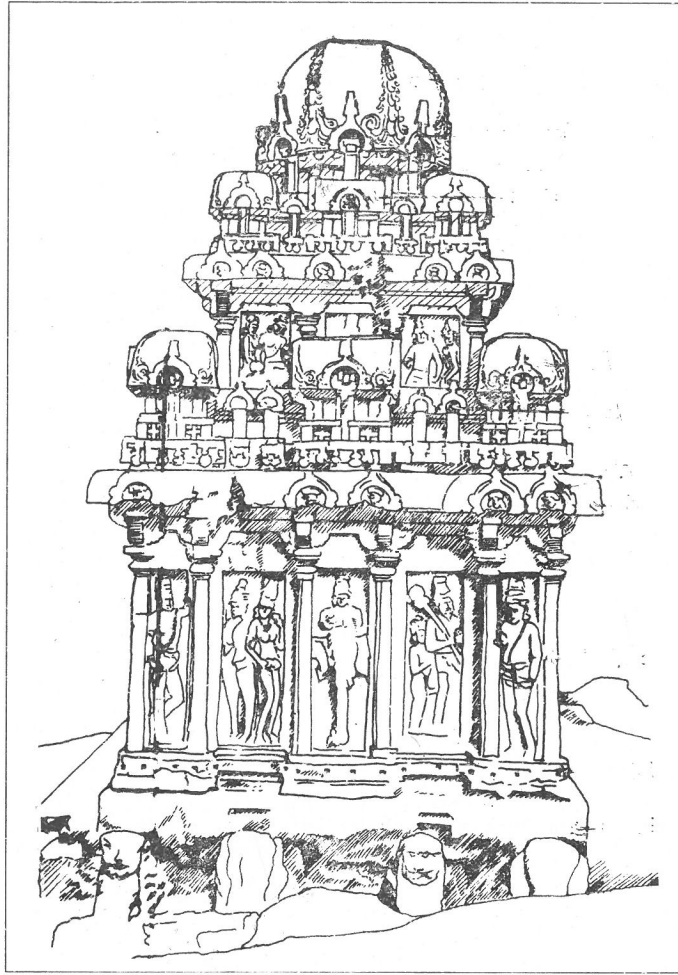


Draupadi ratha, Māmallapuram.

This represents a major shift in the conception of a shrine. It is not any relic that is contained within the cella, as it was in the stūpa, but

an icon carved by a sculptor. And the icon-containing chamber was not closed but was open to the worshipper. The square plan and the pyramidal roof (although four cornered) are in a way continuations of the stūpa theme; but the suggestion of a hut is unmistakable. The four *torāṇas* of the stūpa occur here as four doors, three of which are blind, and the one facing the icon within the cella being open. The blind doors have also the representations of the same divinity as the sanctum contains. Thus the divinity is made to face all the four quarters.

The intent of the four gateways to the stūpa is not lost here. Further, the sanctum, which is an innovation, is a small one, admitting but one worshipper at a time. The shrine



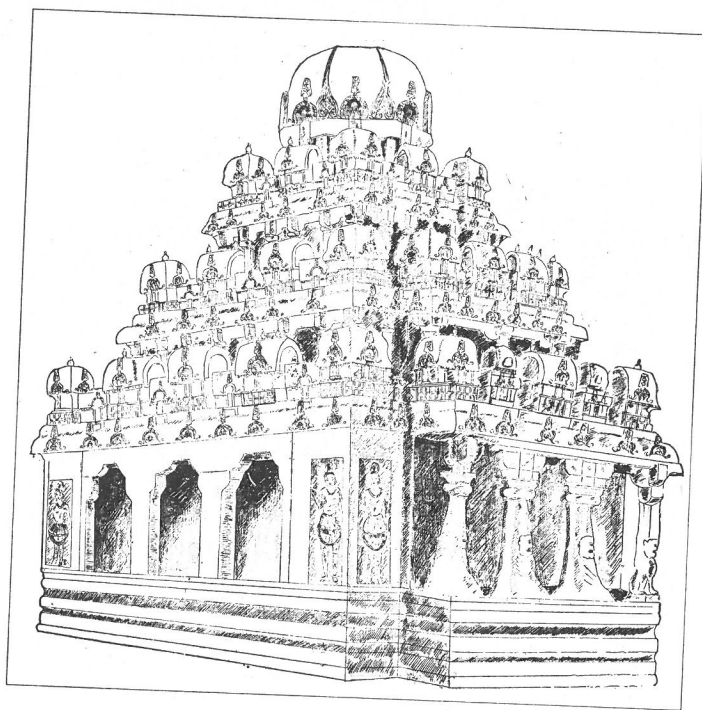
Arjuna ratha, Māmallapuram

was no doubt public, but the idea did not accommodate the community assembly as yet. This may be seen as the beginning of a monumental

temple. In the canonical description, it is the sanctum alone that constitutes the real temple. Here is therefore the basic shrine. The shrine

named after Dharmarāja, which is located at the other end of the series, is actually dedicated to Śiva; it has a *linga* installed in the sanctum. But the cella is surmounted by a pyramidal and turrated *vimāna* which provided the model for all *vimānas* in the temple of the Draviḍian style. The portico is open and pillared.

If these shrines are rather sparse in sculptural details and mythological representations, there are about ten excavated rock-cut halls nearby which are in the nature of pillared assembly halls (*maṇḍapas*) where excellent sculptural panels are carved in rock-reliefs; the themes are mythological



Dharmarāja ratha, Māmallapuram.

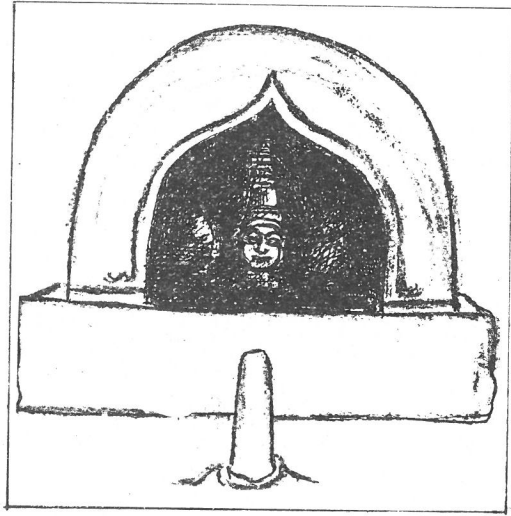
such as Varāha rescuing the earth, Durgā slaying the Buffalo-demon, and Kṛṣṇa lifting the Govardhana hill. The patron king is also portrayed with his two consorts. Sculptures include secular themes and animal portraiture. These *maṇḍapas* are not in the nature of shrines; art is of predominant interest here and they may be regarded as sculpture-galleries.

Ascribable almost to the same period are the two excavated cave-temples at Nāmakkal in Salem district in Tamiḻ-Nāḍu bearing some resemblance to the *maṇḍapas* in Māmallapuram in the matter of sculptured panels. These, however, are cave-shrines and are dedicated to Viṣṇu. One of the caves is called in the inscription there as

‘Atiyanātha-viṣṇu-grha’ (House of Viṣṇu dedicated by the Atiya King). The king of Atiya (or Adiyaman) dynasty mentioned here was Guṇaśīla, who ruled from Tagaḍūr (present-day Dharmapurī) in Tamiḻ-Nāḍu, around 750 A.D. Three of the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu (Vāmaṇa, Narasimha and Varāha) provide themes for some very fine sculptures; and the narrative style has been employed. The representations are vigorous, if also somewhat stylized.

An interesting group of four cave-temples are to be found at Bādāmi, a charming valley in the Karnāṭaka region. The caves were excavated during the reigns of the Chāḷukya Kings, Kīrtivarman I and Maṅgaḷīśa, in the sixth century.

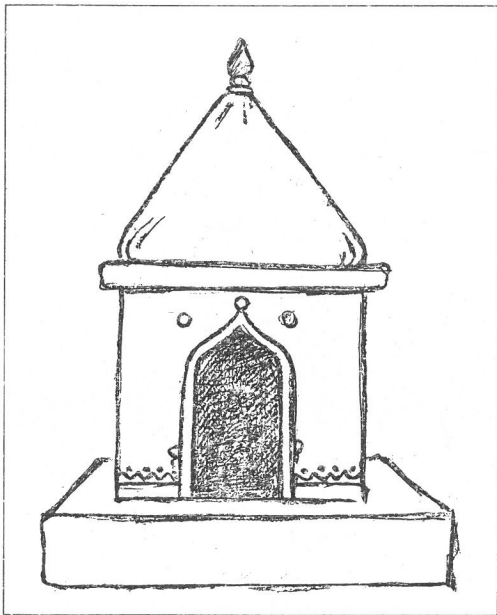
These Kings were in cultural contact with the North as well as the South, and we find in the these cave-temples and also in the structural shrines due to them in the region, a fusion of several stylistic details and the emergence of fresh styles. Of the four cave-temples, one is Jaina. The largest among them, known as cave No.III, is also the earliest (about 578 A.D), and was carved at the instance of Kīrtivarman I (566-597). It is dedicated to Viṣṇu, and we have here a majestic and splendid sculpture in relief of Trivikrama, and another imposing relief statue of Viṣṇu seated on the hooded serpent facing the corridor. Caves I and II, dedicated to Śiva, bear an obvious impact of the last cave in the Ajaṇṭā group. These cave-temples illustrate the



combination of sanctuary and shrine.

The structural stone-temples in the Karnāṭaka region are of great antiquity. Some of such temples in Aihole (in Bijāpur district) like the Kontagudi and Lād-Khān temple (before 500 A.D.) are earlier than the cave-temples. The impressive 'Durgā' temple on a raised platform 2.44 meters high in this small temple-town (containing no less than

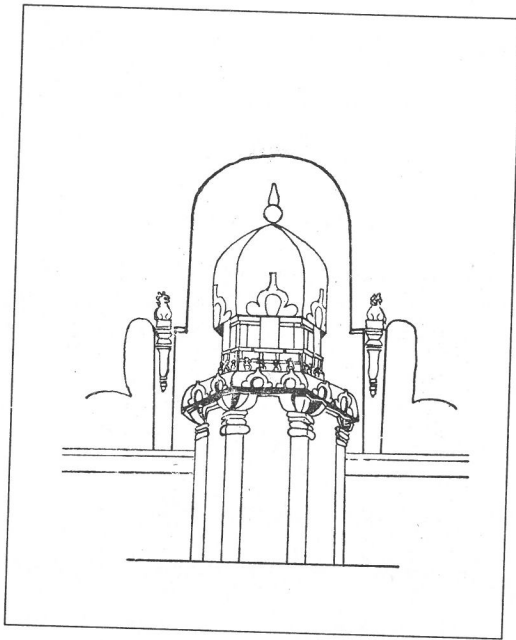
70 temples) was begun around 450 A.D., although it was completed almost a century later. These temples appear to have been clever adaptations of the Buddhist Chaitya details, but they have incorporated the Gupta element of Śikhara.



The Guptas (330-530 A.D.) were great temple-builders: and the earliest of the extant and

independent structural temples in the North date back to their times. The Śikhara as a monumental spire on top of the sanctum evolved in the fifth century, probably under the patronage of the Gupta kings. As a massive dome surmounted by an ornamental pinnacle (*stūpī*), it became the characteristic feature of the Indian temple, permitting some stylistic and regional variations. The relation of the expression *stūpī* for the pinnacle of the formalized and pyramidal spire with *Stūpa* as the monumental tumulus is not accidental; nor is it merely a linguistic coincidence. The involvement of the *stūpa* idea is fundamental to the *śikhara* notion.

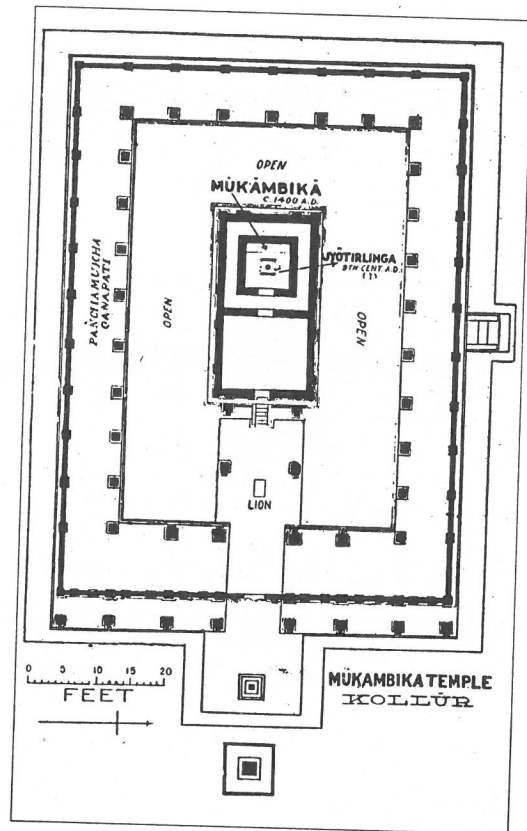
Besides the early temples at Banavāsi and Tālagunda, which we

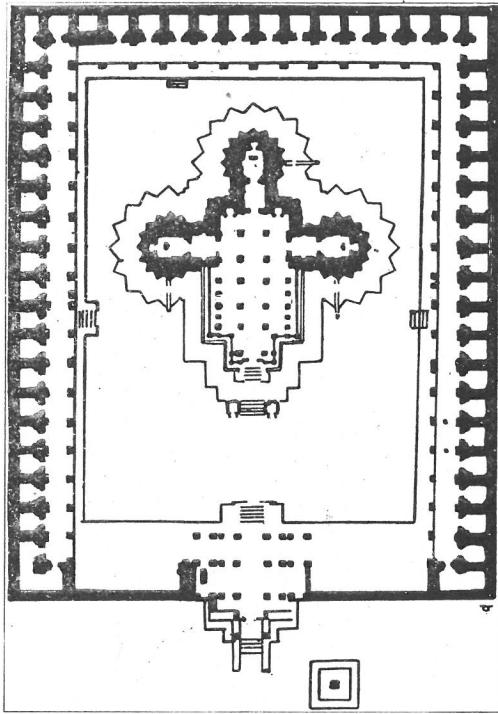


Relief in Nakula-Sahadeva ratha

have had occasion to mention and which were well-known shrines even during the days of the Sātavāhana rulers (the first two centuries after Christ), the Kadamba inscriptions refer to many such temples in Halmiḍi, Puligere, Halasi and Maḷavalli. The Praṇaveśvara temple at Tālagunda was earlier than 450 A.D. and the Jina temple at Halasi

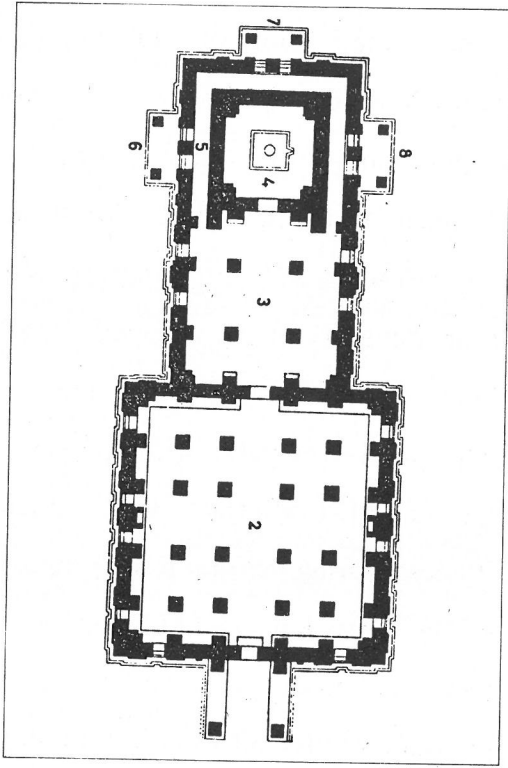
goes back to the days of the Kadamba ruler Mṛgeśa-varman (about 455 A.D.). With the exception of the temples at Guḍimallam and Chejerla in Andhra-Pradesh, these temples are the oldest monumental experiments in South India.





The Paraśurāmeśvara temple at Guḍimallam (near Reṇiguṇṭa in North Arcot district) is said to be a work of the second century A.D. The chief interest of this temple lies in the unusual and probably earliest iconic representation of Śiva found in its cella. We will have occasion to consider this interesting icon in

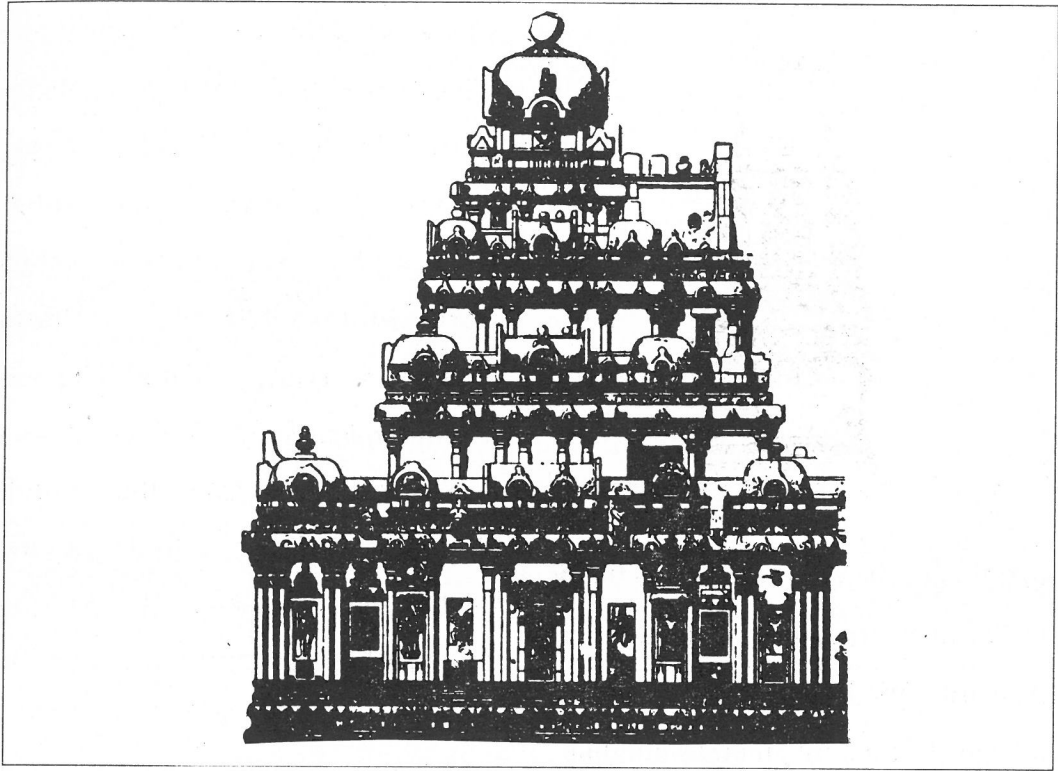
some detail later on. Of greater significance, however, is the Kapotiśvara shrine at Chejerla in Āndhra Pradesh. This structural temple was built probably in the fourth century at the instance of the kings of the Ānanda gotra lineage who ruled over parts of the present-day Guṇṭūr district in Āndhra Pradesh during the first few centuries of the Christian era. Although it is now a Śiva shrine, it was undoubtedly meant to be a Buddhist sanctuary. It was probably the king Dāmodara-varman, whom an inscription describes as “devoted to the feet of the perfectly enlightened Buddha” (*samyak-sambuddha-pādānudhyāta*) that built this shrine, which is modelled after the oblong Buddhist *chaitya*-hall in the ‘back-of-the-elephant’ (*gajapṛshṭha*) shape.



There is an interesting suggestion that the Pallava ruler Mahendrarman, who was a great enthusiast of the stone-shrines, was a kinsman of the royal family of Ānanda-gotra lineage (as also of the Vishṇukunḍi kings), was inspired by the Chejerla temple. It may be noticed that rock-cut shrines (the so-called Pāṇḍava

rathas), especially the ones named after Bhīma and Sahadeva, bear a definite resemblance to the Chejerla temple.

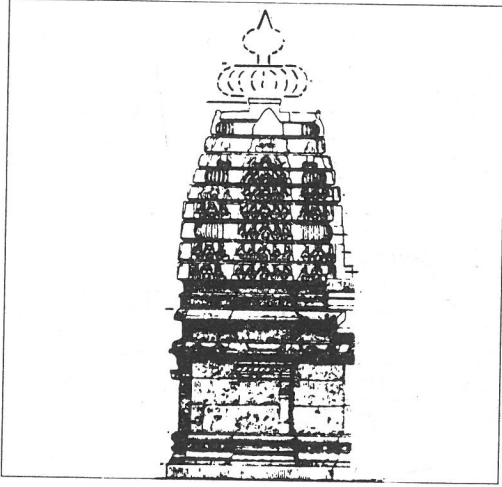
Within the kingdom of the Chālukyas of Badāmi was Paṭṭadakallu (called Kisuvolal in old texts), now in the Badāmi tāluk of Bijāpur district in Karnāṭaka. It was an important township, especially favoured by the Lakuliśa-Pāśupata sect of the Śaivas. Even the Greek traveller Ptolemy (around 150 A.D.) mentions this town along with Badāmi. There are about ten ancient temples in this place, most of them built during the seventh and eighth centuries. The most famous among them, the Virūpāksha temple built around 740 A.D.) appears to have been modelled after the Rājasimha



temple at Kāñchīpuram (about 700 A.D.); and it is likely that it inspired the Kailāsa temple at Ellora (built by the Rāshṭrkūṭa king Kṛshṇa I, 757 A.D., around an old cave-shrine dedicated to Śiva).

The earlier name for the temple was after Lokēśvara, the

Mahāyāna Buddhist divinity who had close association with the Lakuliśa-Śaiva cult; there is also a suggestion that it was named so after Lokamahādevī, the queen of the Chālukya king Vikramādevī II. A remarkable, and altogether unprecedented, feature about the Paṭṭadakallu temple is that we have an inscriptional



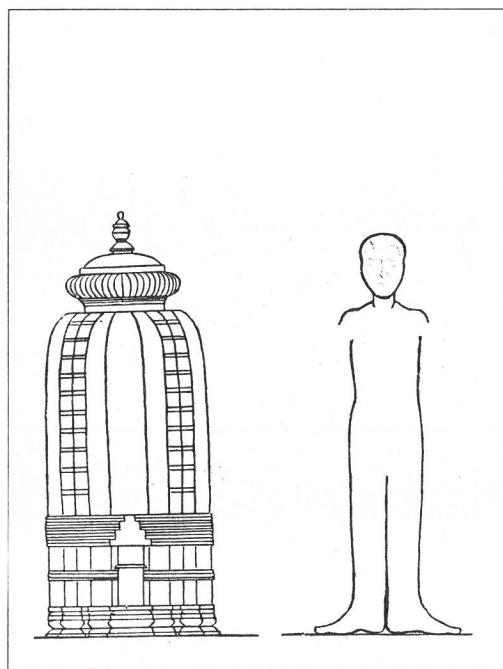
mention of the architect who actually built this structure: 'sūtradhāri' Anivārīta-guṇḍa. For the first time in the history of temple-building, the craftsman is given his due recognition.

It is also interesting that in many sculpture-pieces in Chālukya temples, and later in the Hoysala temples, which may indeed be regarded as a regional variation of the Chālukya style, we find names

of the sculptors inscribed on them: Changaman, Pullappan, Nrammaṇa-devan, Deva-ārya, Baladevamayya, Achala-deva-ayya, Narasobba, Ganasobba, Śilemuddara śishya sarvasiddhi-āchāryara chaṭṭa Revaḍi-voajja, Guṇḍācharya, Gammamāchārya, Teṅkaṇa-diṣeya āchāri (sculptor from the South), Dāsōja of Bālligāme, Kedāroja and Mallitamma (of Belūr, Halebid and Somanāthapura temples). It may be noted that in the history of Indian temple architecture the names of sculptors have thus been recorded only in Karnāṭaka, from sixth century onwards.

The original shrine was probably austere and one celled, with an imposing although modest *śikhara*, but it came to have in due course numerous pavilions.

It became a complex structure, but not forsaking the dominant element of harmony. We should turn to the Vijayeśvara (now known as Sangameśvara) temple, if we want to have an idea of how the original temple would have looked like without a porch. This latter temple was an earlier one, having been built by Vijayāditya (696-733 A.D.).



A still earlier temple is the one dedicated to Śiva (or Viṣṇu, according to Percy Brown), with a short tower of the Pāpanātha, North Indian type. An obvious and bold disregard of the canonical proportions characterizes this temple, which has constructed before 690 A.D. A narrow circumambulatory passage, a disproportionately large vestibule, greatly spread out pillars, and the hesitantly low vimāna make the temple closer to the rock-cut shrines than to the structural ones. In the half-pavilion (*ardhamāṇḍapa*), structurally removed from the main shrine, is sculptured a fine Naṭārāja group. The sculptor's name (Baladevamayya) is inscribed on the panel near the left shoulder of the main figure.

The temple-complex of the Chālukyas of Badāmi, scattered in Badāmi, Aihole, Paṭṭadakallu, Kopaṇa, Puligere and Vakkunda, marks an important phase in the evolution of temple architecture in India. It not only marks a definite transition from the rock-cut shrines to structural temples, but it reveals numerous experiments in stylistic variation. Here, perhaps, was the origin of the classical trichotomous classification of Indian temples into Nāgara, Drāviḍa and Vesara.

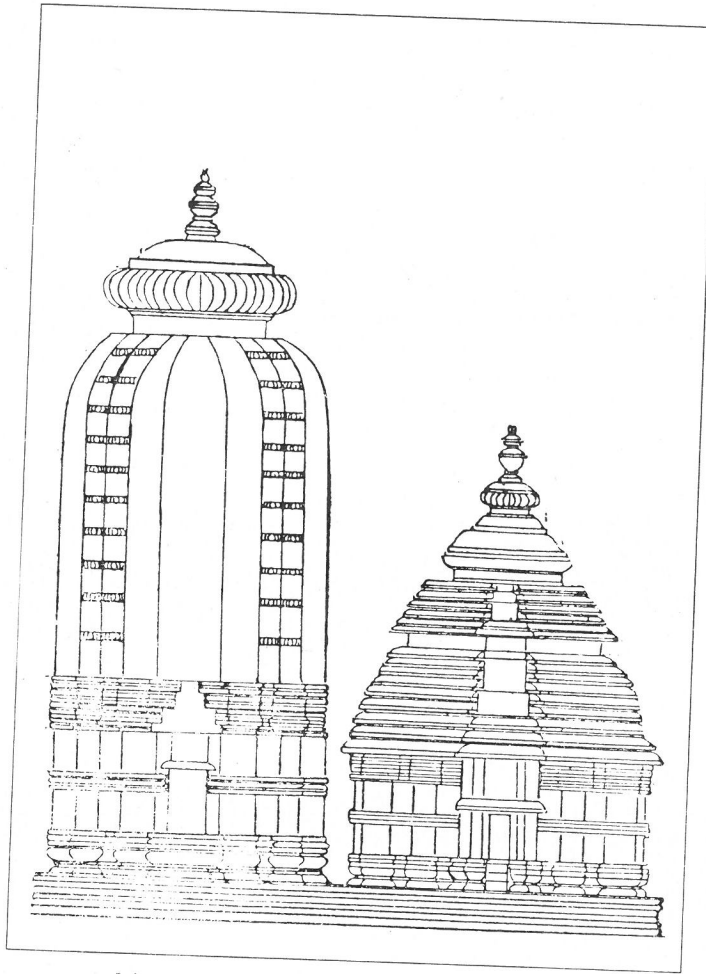
While this classification is neither neat nor absolute, it points to certain trends of stylistic variation, especially with regard to the śikhara treatment. Texts like *Vishṇu-tilaka*, *Māṇasāra*, *Mukutāgama*, *Śilparatna*, *Maya-mata* and *Īśāna-śiva-guru-*

paddhati, which deal with this classification, give broad hints about their differing features. There are texts (like *Vishṇu-tantra*, and *Mārkaṇḍeya-samhitā*) which group temples into nine types; in addition to the above three, they mention Sārvadeśika, Kalinga, Varāṭa (the three regional styles, recognized in *Kāmikāgama*), Mandira, Bhavana and Yoga. But the variations detailed here are too minute and minor to be of much practical significance. The trichotomous classification alone was regarded as valid and inclusive. And, both *Śilpa-ratna* and *Īśāna-śiva-guru-paddhati* insist that this classification refers only to the śikhara. It is said that the word Nāgara actually means squarish, Vesara circular, and Drāviḍa polygonal (six or eight sided). But

this refers, according to these texts, to plinth of the temple (*adhishṭhāna*) rather than to the shape of the towering spire. Whatever the stylistically differentiating features, the territorial grouping is also done in the texts. The classical description is that the Nāgara type prevails in the land between the Himālayas and Vindhyā ranges, the Vesara between the Vindhyā ranges and the river Krishṇā, and the Drāviḍa in the country between that river and Kanyākumāri. There is also a variant description, denoting the Southern style (between Krishṇā and Kanyākumāri) as Vesara and the Central style (between Vindhyā and Krishṇā) as Drāviḍa. The significance of Vesara is that it is a mixed style. The Nāgara temple is square or cruciform in plan and its śikhara has

a vertical emphasis. The Drāviḍa, on the other hand, emphasizes the horizontal aspect; its śikhara is octagonal or domical, or in the shape of a vaulted roof. Another distinguishing feature of this type is the tall and storeyed towers on gateways (gopuras); but this is a later innovation. The Vesara is circular in plan or apsidal and combines the śikhara-features of the other two types.

The temples built by the Chālukyas of Badāmi are said to conform more or less to the Vesara typology, but we find examples of the other two types also. In fact, the textual incorporation of these types must have followed the actual construction of these temples. The tendency to emphasize the element



Lingaraja temple, Bhubaneswar, Orissa

of tower over the sanctum in monumental and structural temples which we see initiated in the Paṭṭadakallu complex found their

fulfilment in both North Indian and South Indian temples. Two fine and early examples of the typical and stylized South Indian Drāviḍa

treatment of the tower are the Shore-temple at Māmallapuram and Kailāsanātha temple at Kāñchīpuram, both built by the Pallava-ruler Narasimhavaraman II (also called Rājasimha, about 680-720 A.D.). It is probable that the Virūpāksha temple at Paṭṭadakallu was directly influenced by them. But stylistic variations have been tried out here. The Gaḷaganātha temple has the tall śikhara with the āmalaka motif, which undoubtedly was the forerunner of the typical spiral Nāgara type. Likewise, the Viśveśvara temple provided the model for the characteristic Kalyāṇa-Chālukya tower.

The transition of the Nāgara idiom to the North is best illustrated by the early, broad, squatty and low vimāna of the Paraśurāmeśvara

temple of Bhuvaneśvar (built around 750 A.D.), which strongly reminds one of the so-called Durgā temple at Aihole. Its development into a typical Orissan style with a tall tower and the tiered front pavilion roof can be seen in the Mukteśvara temple, built about two centuries later, and the great Lingarāja Temple built around 1000 A.D., in the same town. A variant idiom was evolved in Central India, with preference for pyramidal śikhara rising on an elevated masonry terrace, as illustrated by about twenty temples that are extant in Khajurāho (in Bundelkhand, Madhya Pradesh) built between 950 and 1050 A.D. These temples also reveal a tendency to integrate the several structural details into a neatly packed mass. However, sculptural enthusiasm dominates the architectural skill here.



CHAPTER VI

THE TEMPLE AS A STRUCTURE AND ENTERPRISE

The Indian temple is not a mere building; it is an image of the holy, a conception of divinity. While it is both natural and necessary for the image to be projected into a spatial arrangement and concretized by a structural monument, the image does not necessarily depend upon such activities for its continuance. It is true that the urge for the expression of the image has grown from a simple ring of stones laid on the flat ground to a vast complex of shrines, chapels, pavilions, corridors, yards, and tanks. It is also true that sometimes townships have grown inside the temple enclosure; and the administrative machinery in

many cases is elaborate and involved. But the basic truth about the temple is the image that people have of it, and this centers round the icon available for worship. The icon is the source of this image.

It is not impossible to conceive of an icon devoid of the temple paraphernalia. In fact, it is not till a late period in the history of Indian religion that the temple as a distinct socio-religious institution began. Early shrines were probably confined to the icons. The custom of building the temple first and then preparing an icon to be installed in it is a later one. According to strict canonical

considerations, a temple must be built for the icon, and not an icon got ready for the temple, for a temple is really only an outgrowth of the icon, an image of the icon.

It is impossible to indicate when exactly the custom of building stylized temples began in our country. There is hardly a structural shrine that can reach back to the third or even the fourth century A.D. But temples must have been there much earlier. The village shrines of thatch and mud, bamboo and wood would not have been meant to survive till our days. The builders of such shrines had no eye for abiding fame. They did not aspire that their buildings should last "till the sun and the moon and stars cease shining", as the later kings

and chieftains vaingloriously wanted. Early constructions were not instruments of vanity or even acts of piety, but necessary means of worship.

There is evidence to suppose that the early shrines were temporary structures, erected when the occasion of community-worship demanded, and were pulled down later. The canonical concept of 'pavilion' (*maṇḍapa*) supports this supposition. The old text *Viśvakarma-prakāśa* suggests that the purpose of the pavilion is to accommodate the people that gather to participate in the worship ritual. People gather to worship at the temple only occasionally. Every house had its own shrine, and daily worship would be conducted there.

Two kinds of shrines are recognized: 'private' shrines, meant for the individual devotee and for his family (*ātmārtha*); and 'public', meant for all the people in the community (*parārtha*). In the former case the performers and the participants are not different, whereas in the latter the priests are the performers and people are the participants. The sanctum of the public shrine would be for the performance of the worship ritual, and the pavilions for the participants to assemble and partake of the proceedings. Temporary structures would be put up when large groups of participants are expected to gather.

It is only later that such structures tended to become more permanent; and the early stimulus came probably from the Indo-Greeks

who became converts to Indian religions. We have inscriptions that reveal their influence. Heliodorus (son of Dion), the Indo-Greek ambassador who resided in the city of Takshaṣilā around the second century B.C., was a devotee of Viṣṇu, a 'bhāgavata', and got erected a stone column in honour of "Vāsudeva, the god of gods (*deva-deva*)". An inscription in Brāhmī characters on this *garuḍa-dhvaja*, found in Besnagar (the old Vidiśa) near the present-day Bhilsā near Gwālior, Madhya Pradesh, suggests the existence of some sort of a temple. An inscription belonging to the same period speaks of "an excellent temple (*prāsāda*) dedicated to Bhagavān". The Śaka satrap, Rājūvala, son of Shoḍāśa, who styled himself 'the great satrap' (*mahā-*

kshatrapa), tells us in an inscription found in Morā near Mathurā (Uttar Pradesh) that he got built a stone temple for the icons representing five great heroes of the 'Vṛshṇi clan' (bhagavatam vṛshṇīnām pañca-vīrāṇām pratimāḥ śaila-deva-gri.....).

The five great ones constitute the family of Vāsudeva, the form of Viṣṇu extolled in the Bhāgavata cult: Vāsudeva, Samkarshaṇa, Pradyumna, Aniruddha, and Sāmba. The first two of these heroes, identified with Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu and his brother Bala-rāma (who was later merged in the concept of Kārtikeya-subrahmanya) appear to have been popular divinities during the days prior to the Christian era. There is another second century B.C.

inscription found at Ghosunḍi (Nagari near Chittor in Rājasthān), which speaks of a "stone temple-enclosure with a garden dedicated to Nārāyaṇa" (*pūjāśilāprākāra-Nārāyaṇa-vāṭikā*) meant for the worship of the "the unconquered heroes and lords of all, Vāsudeva and Samkarshaṇa" (*anihatābhyām sarveśvarābhyām vāsudeva-samkarshaṇābhyām*).

What these temples were like is hard to conjecture. It is not even certain that they were temples in the same sense as the present-day temples are. They may have been only open enclosures around an icon. Icons were older than temples. We know, for instance, that the celebrated temple on the top of the Tirumala hills (in Andhra Pradesh)

was not there during the days of the early Ālvārs, the Vaishṇava saints of the South, viz., the third and fourth centuries A.D. Their Tamiḻ songs describe the majestic Vengadam icon as free-standing and exposed to sunshine and rain; there was only a dwarf rampart enclosing the icon. The famous five-foot icon of Śiva(?) found at Guḍimallam (near Renigunṭa, in North Arcot district) has been assigned by Ānanda Coomaraswamy to the first century B.C. It is now housed in Paraśurāmeśvara temple, which is not a structure of any great antiquity. It is likely that this icon also was free-standing. We have from the village Burhikhār (in Bilāspur district, Madhya Pradesh) an inscribed sculpture of the same period (first century B.C.), worshipped as

‘Chatur-bhuji Bhagavān’ (four-armed Viṣṇu) and gifted by some lady Prajāvātī. There is, however, no mention of a temple having been there to house it.

The Purāṇas, which are medieval works, contain not only praises of temples but promise great glory to the builders of temples. *Agni-purāṇa*, for instance, says that if a person merely desired to build a temple for Viṣṇu, all the sins that he had accumulated during all his previous lives would disappear. *Haya-śirsha-samhitā* proclaims that if one should put a brick in place for building a temple and die soon after that act, he would have acquired the benefits of performing a sacrifice. *Viṣṇu-rahasya* promises heaven even for a child that playfully

builds a temple in the sands. Such praises and promises suggest that temples had already been looked upon as acts of great merit, and that temples were being built in large numbers by the rich and pious folk. This activity was encouraged by affirmations that a single temple built would confer merits that one would acquire by performing two sacrifices together, 'Rājasūya' and 'Aśvamedha' (*Vishṇudharmottara*). It was the new substitute for the probably disappearing tradition of performance of elaborate sacrifices.

The early Purāṇas had focussed the religious attention of the country on a few places which were regarded as especially favourite of the gods; the divine presence was supposed to be spontaneous and abundant in

such spots. Their celebrity has continued till our own day. Instances are Badarī-vana, Kedāra-nātha, Indra-dyumna (Jagannātha-puri), Kāśī (Banaras), prayāga, Somanātha, Simhādri, Venkaṭāchala (Tirumalai), Setu (Rāmeśvaram), and Kāñchīpuram. Here the icons were reputed to be 'self-manifest' (*svayam-vyakta*), not made by man; and therefore what remained for man to do and what was required of him for acquiring merit was to build temples over them. And the places themselves were considered holy, and visits to them were held especially meritorious. Pilgrimage, which still remains as one of the essential features of Indian religions, was largely the contribution of the Purāṇas. The essence of the holy place was concretized in a shrine,

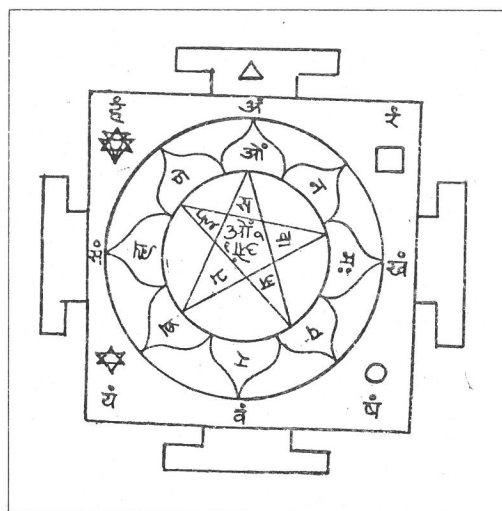
often containing the icon that was reputed to be 'self-manifest'. Structural additions to such shrines, buildings to accommodate the pilgrims, tanks to provide water to them, free refectories to cater to their needs, and other acts of charity were deemed meritorious. There are instances where whole townships have grown out of shrines. These are in scriptures called 'independent' (*svatantra*) shrines, in contradistinction to the temples built for the sake of a village or township ('dependent' or *paratantra* shrines).

This is how vast temple-complexes evolved in hundreds of 'sacred sites' (*kshetras*), strewn all over the country. But when places which did not command such Purāṇic prestige emerged into importance owing to political or

commercial reasons, they were also got sanctified by kings of chieftains or influential residents through the installation of icons and construction of shrines. Sometimes, icons were brought over from the ancient, sacred sites which had been deserted or which were not easily accessible to people. The conquering kings sometimes carried away prestigious icons as booty and got them set up in their own capitals. Or, more frequently, replicas of icons from the accreditedly sacred sites were got made and installed. There are, for instance, hundreds of Kāśi-Viśvanātha temples in the country today, and hundreds of Kedāreśvara shrines; Venkaṭeśvara shrines have sprung up in large numbers all over the country and even abroad after the original shrine at Tirumalai.

Thus, not only architects but sculptors got busy during the middle ages. And, to fulfil the new need, several texts prescribing the norms, styles, methods and measurements of the temples and icons came to be written. Craft-guilds were organized, and kings and chieftains undertook to be patrons of artists and craftsmen connected with temple building.

Craftsmen's organization was in terms of four classes of skilled workers: the designing architect (*sthapati*), the surveyor (*sūtragrāhin*), the sculptor (*takshaka*), and the builder (*vardhakī*). The architect directed and co-ordinated the activities of others; he was in general charge of the entire construction, and was expected to have an expert



acquaintance with the canonical norms. The surveyor was hierarchically next to the architect; his special area of work concerned with proportions, vertical and horizontal (*māna and unmāna*). The sculptor worked with stones, cut them into large and small pieces according to plan and design; he also sculpted images and attended to decorations. He was free to work as his fancy dictated, within the

general framework provided by the architect. He was acquainted with canonical prescriptions and descriptions concerning icons and sculptural ornamentation, and his creativity was not only acknowledged but praised. The builder put the pieces, cut and worked by the sculptor together, and attended to the temple coming up (the term *vardhakī* means 'an increaser'). His professional affiliation was with the carpenter's craft. It may be remembered that early temples were constructions in wood, and carpenters were the main craftsmen who attended to them. The work of all these four classes of artisans was often supervised by a director or manager (*sthāpaka* or *sthānika*) who was not only learned in temple-craft but a priest as well; he was the

administrative chief of the temple who had control over the other priests who were directly responsible for the details of worship in the temple.

Worship in the temple was more formalized than domestic worship and it involved many more details than the latter. It therefore necessitated many priests and assistants. And numerous festivals were incorporated into the normal working of the temple. The devotees who assembled had to be given token food blessed by the offering-rituals (*naivedya*, *prasāda* or *bhoga*); and in olden days pilgrims were also fed in the temple. The temple had also to provide place for assemblies of devotees and their socio-religious performances.

All this meant not only an increase in the staff of the temple and a more elaborate administrative procedure but a growth in the spatial arrangement. The temple had to have several halls, not strictly connected with the routine worship: audience pavilion (*ranga-maṇḍapa*), treasury and store-house (*Śrī-bhaṇḍāra*), the chamber for the performance of daily and occasional sacrifices (*yāga-śālā*), kitchen (*pāka-śālā*), dining hall (*Śiva-kūṭa* in Śaivite temples and *Rāmānuja-kūṭa* in Vaishṇavite temple in the South, *bhoga-maṇḍapa* in the North), marriage-hall (*kalyāṇa-maṇḍapa*), the rooms where the festival-vehicles were kept (*vāhāna-maṇḍapa*), and the temple-tank (*kalyāṇi*, *pushkariṇi*, or *teppakuḷam* in South). And in addition to the main icon in the

sanctum, several other icons in the nature of consorts (Amman or Devī), attendants (*parivāra*), and companions (*pārśva*) had to be provided with separate chambers, cells or at least niches in canonically fixed positions. The temple thus became increasingly complex both architecturally and administratively. Especially the temples that came to be favoured by royal patronage got even unnecessary and superfluous halls and pavilions added devoutly and periodically; the structure tended to grow out of all proportion to the function.

But the added structure does not necessarily add to the value of the shrine. The real temple consists of the sanctum in which the icon is housed, and the immediate

structural involvements that are essential for the main worship ritual. In fact, the canonical texts describe the sanctum alone as the real temple. *Śrī-praśna* declares that the sanctum is the divinity's body and the icon is its soul (*jīva*). Usually it is a stone structure, square in shape and severely plain, although there could be niches for other icons on the outer walls. There will be no pillars, and the sanctum will be altogether devoid of windows or ventilators. The shutting off of air and light was meant to preserve the icon which, in olden days, was made of wood, stucco, or even clay. Besides preventing the ill-effects of weathering, the dark interior added to the mystery of the divine presence in the sanctum represented by an empty and low platform (*vedī*,

probably with a mystic diagram called *maṇḍala*), a copper vessel placed on a seat (*kumbha*), a sacrificial fireplace (*kuṇḍa*) or a sculpted icon (*bimba*). Although it is usual to find the sanctum built in stone, constructions in brick are not rare. *Vishṇu-tilaka* mentions that while the stone sanctum is the best, the brick one is the next best; the wooden sanctum however is inferior, and the mud one is said to be the worst.

The sanctum is technically known as the 'garbhagrha' ('the womb-house') and 'Deul' (in the North). It is insisted that this part of the temple must be constructed first, and before the construction a significant ceremony known as 'impregnating' (*garbhādhāna* or

garbha-nyāsa) should be performed. This ritual involves letting into the earth a ceremonial copper pot, containing nine precious stones, several metals and minerals, herbs and soils, symbolising creation and prosperity. The building which contains this 'womb' is said to prosper, and not the one which lacks it (*Siddhānta-śekhara*). After the completion of this ritual, a stone slab (*ādhāra-śilā*) is placed over the spot where the copper pot has been buried. This stone slab will be the foundation for the installation of the icon. The copper-pot symbolises the womb, and the icon the soul. The sanctum that is built round it is the body. This is the significance of the sanctum being called 'the womb-house'. Texts like *Śilpa-ratna*, *Tantra-samucchaya* and *Īśāna-śiva-*

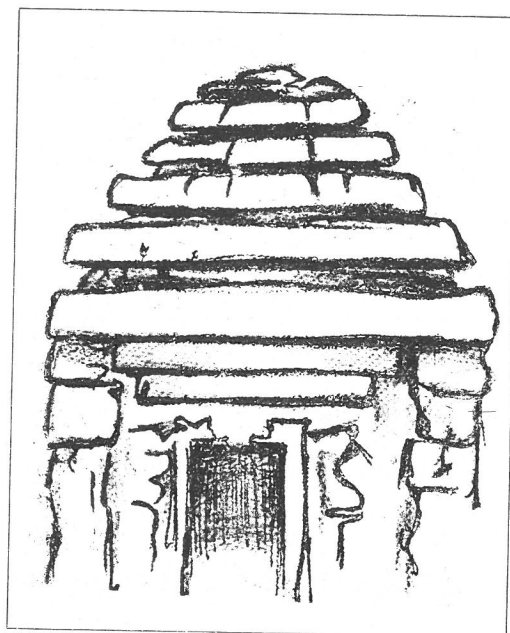
guru-paddhati give an elaborate account of this ritual.



The sanctum is covered by a flat roof of stone slabs, and sometimes by wooden beams and planks. This serves as the base (*adhishṭhāna*) for the tower that rises above the sanctum. This superstructure known as 'vimāna' or 'śikhara' is an important part of the temple, especially of the temples built in villages and towns. It is

interesting to note in this context that holy places are classified into five kinds in an old text named *Archanā-navanīta*. The first variety is where the divinity is self-manifest (*svayam-vyakta*), the second is where the icons are installed by gods (*daivika*), the third by sages (*ārsha*), the fourth glorified in the Purāṇas (*paurāṇika*), and the last is where the shrine is man-made (*mānusha*). While the first four kinds of places are holy by themselves, the last variety needs to be sanctified by a special effort. The background belief was that the entire area which the *vimāna* overlooked was rendered holy. Thus the *vimāna* construction was a means of sanctifying the otherwise ordinary place.

The early temples were understandably flat-roofed. The



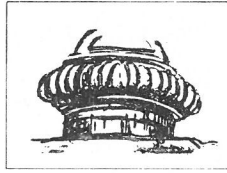
Gupta temples in the North belonging to the fifth century were flat-roofed. We have in Aihole an early specimen of such temples in the Lāṭ-Khān (about 500 A.D.), on the roof of which is another sanctum whose roof consists of stone slabs grooved at the points and pieced together. Sometimes, the temple roof resembled the roof of the huts, as illustrated by the so-called Draupadī

shrine in Māmallapuram. But there was a tendency for the roof to be vaulted or dome-shaped, probably in order to reproduce the shape of the cave-shrines or in imitation of the stūpa-form. The mean mud-shrines in the villages even today are surmounted by a mound of earth, as in the primitive funerary monument. In course of time, the tendency resulted in the pyramidal or curvilinear form. This was regarded as the part of the temple that gave the structure a monumental dignity.

The North Indian temples, especially in Orissa, emphasized this aspect. Perhaps the upper storey of the temple (as in the Lāḍ-Khān temple of Aihole) was stylized into this part; and several storeys were

amalgamated into a decorative spire. By about the eighth century, the towers became parabolic in character. Legends about the mythical mountain Sumeru (or Meru) were employed to highlight the value of the tall towers that rose to impressive heights. Indeed some of the temple-complexes in Orissa and Khajūrāho appear like mountain ranges. The *vimāna* of the Lingarāja temple in Bhuvaneśvar is 125 feet tall; that of the Jagannāth temple at Puri is 200 feet tall, and can be seen from a distance of six miles. In the temples of North India, the main sanctuary comprehending the sanctum (*garbha-grha* or *deul*) as well as the tower above it is called the *vimāna* (or *śikhara*). Although the same connotation obtained in the South, it has become more usual

to confine that expression to the superstructure above the sanctum.

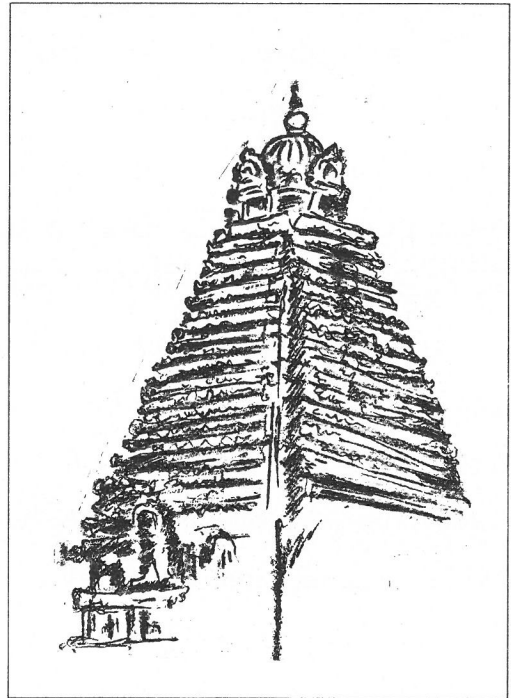


Āmalaka

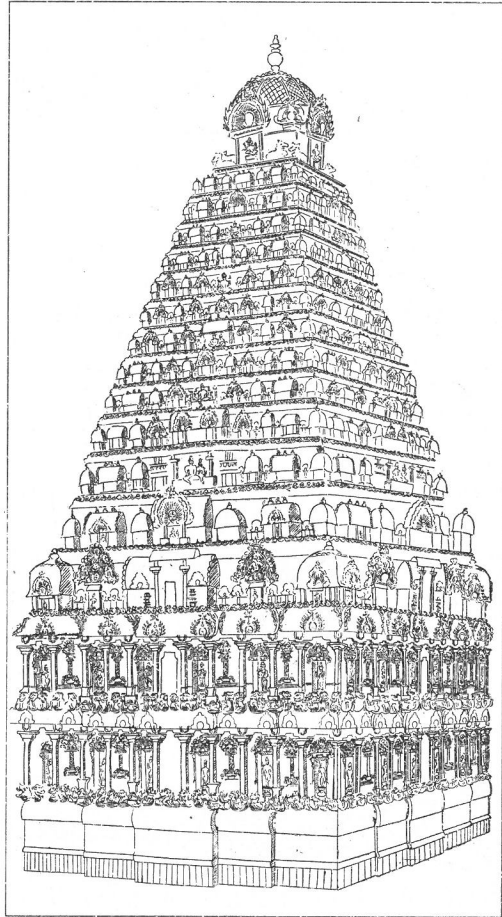
The North Indian *vimāna* is crowned by a large circular (wheel-shaped) capstone block known as *āmalaka*, after the common fruit *emblic myrobelan*; while its South Indian counterpart ends in a cupola (*śṅga*) or wagon-roof (*khakhara*). The South Indian *vimāna* is broader and shorter than the North Indian one, and we find the usual tendency is towards the form of a polygon, on a square or rectangular plan. The North Indian temples rise from a pedestal (*pīṭha*) through the wall (*bāra*) and main body (*gaṇḍī*) to the 'head' (*mastaka*), which consists of a ribbed *āmalaka* surmounted by a 'skull' (*khapurī*), on which is

installed the *kalaśa* (the finial). And on top of the finial will be seen the 'weapon' (*āyudha*) of the deity, a trident or a discus.

In South India, there was emphasis on the *vimāna* in the earlier phase of temple architecture. For



instance, the *vimāna* of the Rājarājisvara (or the so-called Br̥hadeśvara) temple at Tañjāvūr in Tamiḷ Nadu (built by the Chōḷa King Rājarāja I, and consecrated in 1009 A.D.) rises to a height of 58 metres, “an architectural texture of great beauty”. But the tendency was in favour of shorter *vimānas*. For example, the *vimāna* of the temple at Gangaikōṇḍa-chōḷa-puram (built by Rājendra-Chōḷa in 1025 A.D.) was already only 46 metres high. Subsequent *vimānas* are less emphasized in their height, in comparison with the tower over the gateway (*dvāra-gopura*). But the sanctity of the *vimāna* was not affected by the diminished height. While sculpture on the gateway-tower could contain secular and erotic themes, the *vimāna* had to be

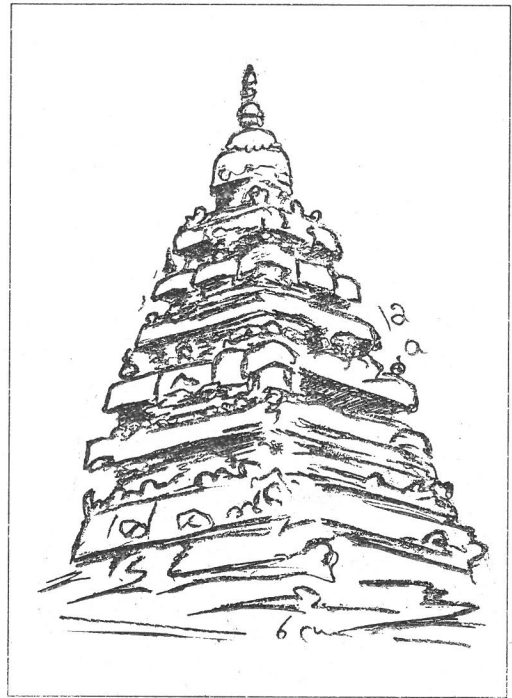


Vimāna, Brihadishvara temple, Tañjāvūr

austere, and could accommodate only the prescribed divinities, associated with the icon in the sanctum. The practice of bowing to the *vimāna* as if that were verily the

outer form of the icon continues even today among the devout folk. The gateway-tower, on the other hand, does not command this reverence. It is more a creature of the donor's pomp and the sculptor's skill than an expression of religious sentiment.

The plan of the *vimāna* could be round or square: it could also be six-sided or eight-sided. It could either retain one form uniformly from its base to the top, or combine two or more plans at different levels. It consisted originally of several distinct storeys, sometimes as many as sixteen, but prevailing style is devoid of such differentiation into storeys. It rises directly above the sanctum, with the flat roof of the sanctum (*bhūmika* or *kapota*) as its



base (*adhishtāna*). Sometimes, however, it encompasses the area covered by the circumambulatory path round the sanctum as well as the rectangular porch immediately in front of the sanctum. Its mass rests on a square base, called 'support' (*adhishtāna* or *pīṭha*), and rises through stylized treatment of

dormer-windows in several tiers to a dome-shaped tower (*śikhara*) surmounted by a cupola (*śṛṅga* or *stūpī*).

Around the sanctum will be a passage, often narrow, permitting the devotees to pass round the sanctum in the customary act of devotion. This circumambulatory path (*pradakṣiṇā-patha* or *bhrama*) became a structural involvement as the temple grew in size; it is more naturally open, as it was in the early phase. The rectangular porch in front of the sanctum (*mukha-maṇḍapa* or *mukha-śālā*) is a pillared hall, allowing the devotees to stand and watch the worship rituals as they are conducted inside the sanctum. When the temple became popular and the participants increased in

number, there was need for an additional hall of considerable dimensions (*navaranga* or *mahā-maṇḍapa*) to accommodate large assemblies. In such an event, the porch became merely a 'vestibule' (*antarāla*), structurally connecting the sanctum with the assembly-hall. This intermediary space was open in the early temples, as for instance it was in the Venkaṭeśvara temple on the Tirumalai hills. But it tended to become a closed hall resting on pillars as the fortunes of the temple prospered.

The area of the temple comprising of the sanctum and halls as well as the tanks and gardens came to be enclosed by a wall (*prākāra*), like the ramparts of a fort. But this was later innovation,

and became an especial feature of South Indian temples. Later canonical texts provide for as many as thirty-two such concentric and enclosing walls, but recommend not more than five or seven, although the need to have more than one was rarely felt. The Ranganātha temple at Śrīrangam in Tamiḻ-Nāḍu has seven enclosing walls, encompassing almost the entire township. Where there are multiple walls, the one nearest to the sanctum is styled as 'the inner enclosure' (*antarmaṇḍapa*) and the outermost as 'the limiting lines' (*maryādāhāra*). In the South Indian temples the *prākāras* are not merely boundary walls; they accommodate a series of pillared halls or pavilions, rooms for storage, resting places for pilgrims, and shrines for minor deities. Although

their chief purpose is protection of temple property, the walls are also rendered elegant and artistic.

Although the texts prescribe that each enclosure must have doorways, on all four sides, with a tower over each one of them, and although we do find large temples (such as the one in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai in Tamiḻ Nāḍu) answering to this prescription, it is commonly the wall facing the sanctum alone that has the opening. This doorway is called *mahā-dvāra*, and usually it is an immense one, allowing the temple elephant or small chariot to pass thorough. Since the tenth century it has become customary to have a tower above the doorway. The ancient texts such as *Vaikhānasāgama*, *Maya-mata* and

Īśāna-śiva-guru-paddhati mention the gateway-tower, but do not consider it as important. One of the earliest towers that can be regarded as impressive is on the gateway to the Āvaṇi-Kandarpeśvara temple in Kīlaiyūr (near Tirucchi in Tamiḷ-Nāḍu). The *gopuras* built by the later Choḷa and Pāṇḍyan rulers between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries are majestic and massive, as in Madhurai, Ticunelveli, Chidambaram, Kumbhakoṇam and Tiruvaṇaikkāval (near Śrīraṅgam). They are multi-storeyed pyramids, oblong in plan, rising tier upon tier, tapering till the wagon-roof *śikhara* with fans (*nāṣī*) on either end representing mythical heads (*kīrimukha*) calls a halt. They really tall *gopura* may reach to the height of about 200 feet. The entire

mass, built of brick and mortar, is filled with stucco figures and decorations.

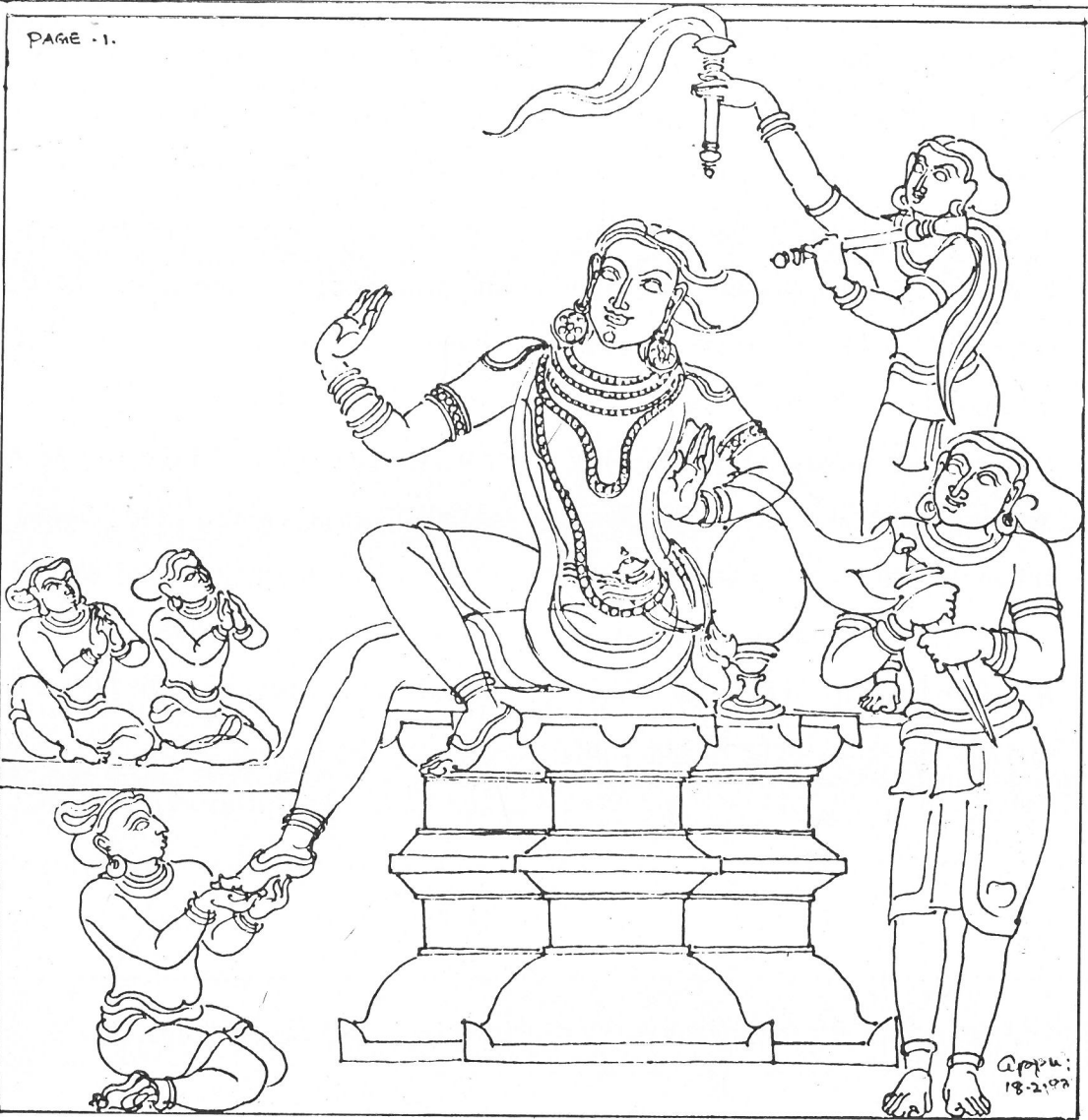
Despite its immensity and artistic profusion, the *gopura* is not regarded as an essential feature of the temple. And it is unique to the South Indian temples. Neither the enclosing wall (*prākāra*) nor the gateway-tower (*dvāra-gopura*) figures prominently in the North Indian temples. And many temple-complexes, as for instance at Khajūrāho, are devoid even of the enclosing walls.

The sanctum, which is the most important structural detail, is closely associated with 'the dispensing seat' (*bali-pīṭha*) which is installed in front of the sanctum directly modelled in

the form of a flat lotus in bloom. In the early shrines it is a mere block of stone, but later, it assumed a relatively elaborate form with a base, cornices, wall-surface and the top-lotus. Actually there will be several 'seats' of this nature, installed in various ritualistically determined positions inside the enclosure and outside the sanctum. However, the one in front of the sanctum is the 'chief seat' (*pradhāna-pīṭha*), and it is on this that the sculptor spends his skill.

The purpose of these seats is to offer food to the attendant and secondary deities, after the main offering has been made in the sanctum. The canons specify that the real temple comprises of the sanctum, the tower on top of it, the icon inside it and 'the dispensing seat' in front of it. These are the essential parts of a shrine. Some texts even proclaim that the extent of the shrine reaches only as far as 'the dispensing seat' and no further.

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CHAPTER VII

THE TEMPLE : TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The Indian temple as an art form has a human as well as a divine character. It exists in its material outfit as something that endures in space and time and as something that was a response to a situational need. It is a building, accomplished by engineers and masons who follow the laws of the physical world and employ their technical skill. Indian temple has even a mathematical basis; the *māna*-orientation was almost in the nature of an obsession with the old temple-builders in India. But the inspiration to the building activity was in every case derived from religious mysticism. The temple has

also a psychological and spiritual existence. It is in the nature of 'sacred art', bringing man into contact with the divine. It enables man to feel the spiritual presence, and to find it in his own heart.

It is not so much to pray that a devotee visits a temple as to feel this presence. He could pray anywhere, and, as every devotee knows, the well-known and popular temples of the present-day are the last places in the world where one can really get into a prayerful mood. If one does not have an inclination for this presence, he does not go beyond what is physical and visible in the temple. It is not enough for

the devotee to believe in God or to believe in the efficacy of prayer. He must have an intuitive apprehension of the presence that makes the



temple a sacred enclosure, and he must be eager to partake of that presence. Without such equipment, the temple would lack meaning and value.

Sensitivity to spiritual presence is not guided by considerations of utility. The Indian temple has been many things: art gallery, economic institution, political power, social organization, crafts-guild, fortress, and refectory. All this has only contributed to the decay of the temple as a spiritual institution. The temple now inclines to be in a less

austere setting. The civilization of machine has made an inroad into it. It is no longer “static and peaceful” as it used to be when the twin demons of speed and utility had not as yet possessed it or us. The human perspective has altered, and the temple has become a mere building, and worse, an office.

The sanctity of the Indian temple depends not on its art or its utility but on its esoteric significance. The texts of Indian architecture are no doubt prolix and full of technical details; but they do not lose sight of the truth that the temple is chiefly meant to be a tool of spiritual realization. The devotee goes to the temple with faith in his heart and

expects to find grace in the shrine.

It is only when man has faith that he can lay claim to grace. And faith does not need *gnosis* or understanding of the symbolism involved in the temple; it even excludes intellection. What it needs is the appropriate mood. In order to create an atmosphere or a mood of holiness and sanctity, which would enable a devotee's faith to become more receptive to this spiritual presence, certain traditional prescriptions like physical cleanliness, postural reverence, and ritual offering have been introduced.

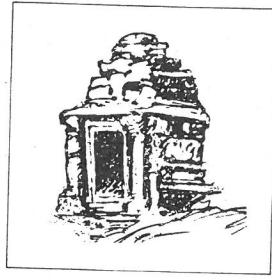
The devotee would have intuitionally apprehended the symbolism. Ability to vocalize or convey it is a different thing, and may be wholly unnecessary. He

would not be seduced by the illusion of anthropomorphism; he would not mistake the human looking icon for a mere human being, nor a temple for a mere building. Art in the temple will not distract him, and technical skill will not hold his attention. He floats over these obstacles and directly reaches the shrine to receive grace.

But when the traditional hold has been loosened, intellectual apprehension of symbolism becomes necessary. Understanding must augment faith. But nothing can be more harmful than attempting to understand ancient images by contemporary attitudes. We often slip into the error of wanting to understand things without really involving ourselves in them. No door

can be opened with merely collecting an odd assortment of keys. The proper key must be selected and involved in the lock. The attitude for understanding needs to be relevant, legitimate and receptive. The pretensions and prejudices of the modern mind can easily lead one astray. Unless sincerity and humility are allowed to inspire the urge to understand, the understanding is bound to be defective and superficial.

The Indian temple has its own symbolism, at once profound, mysterious and relevant for all time. The 'manifestation' of this symbol-complex is in terms of elaborate and intricate spatial projections, material



masses of constructions, passionate patterns of forms, and schematic representations of technical skill. Such manifestations, possessing an objective character, are sought to be described and classified according to prevalent styles in well-defined periods of time and within certain territorial confines. But the 'content' of the temple is an abstract something hidden within (or revealed through) these 'objective' appearances, and quite unattached to styles or periods. It has an inner dimension which is real for the devotee but elusive for a visitor to the temple. The latter is interested in what 'is' out there, while the former is concerned with that 'may be' in relation to himself.

This veiling of the content for a casual person (that is to say, one devoid of faith) is one of the functions of art, for art does not reveal so much as conceal.

The content cannot be concrete. But it is real, provided the perspective is proper. One of the errors the casual man is prone to is the thought that whatever is not manifest either does not exist or is not relevant. He does not suspect that the things that do not appear before the senses may appear to the mind, that what is not apprehended by the intellect may be understood by intuition. Manifestation is in reality an incarnation of the content, which is available only to intuition.

It is natural that the aspect of manifestation comes to be

formalized. The temple is a public institution; its appeal is collective. The priest performs the worship-ritual, not for his own sake but for the sake of all (*parārtha*), unlike in the worship at home. For the devotee, worship in the temple cannot be a substitute for worship at home. In fact, worship at home is obligatory, while the visit to a temple is optional. There is an interesting account of the origin of temples in a celebrated text, *Vishṇudharmottara* :

Time is divided in ancient Indian thought into four immense periods, *Kṛta*, *Tretā*, *Dvāpara* and *Kali*. *Kali* is the dark age we now live in, and temples appeared only during this period. In the first of these divisions there was no need

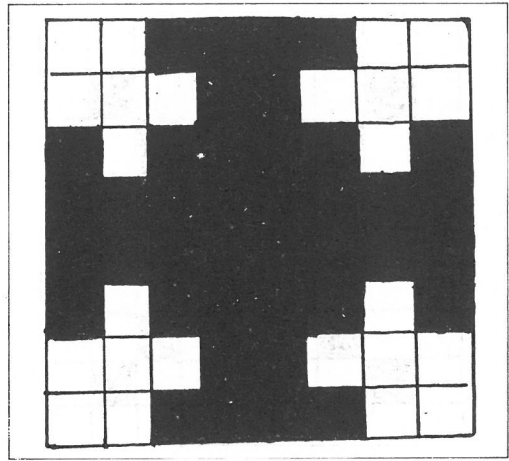
for temple because gods lived and moved amongst humans. In the next division, the presence of gods became scarce and they descended on earth only when men invoked them in sacrifices; but then they came as gods. In the third great division of time, men had only to make images of these gods and worship them; and the gods came down in disguised forms, showering their grace. The worship at that time was only domestic; the shrines were within the precincts of homes. During the last phase of time, temples (as public shrines) began to be built and icons were installed. But the gods ceased coming down in their own or disguised forms. However, their presence was felt when the icons were properly installed, and temples correctly built.

The priests, who were professional performers of worship, were the only ones who were competent to compel this presence; others could only be participants and beneficiaries. In the early phases of this period, the sages merely installed the icons, and the divine presence was with them ever after. But in the later and decadent phases, the presence could be secured only by continuous worship and periodical festivals.

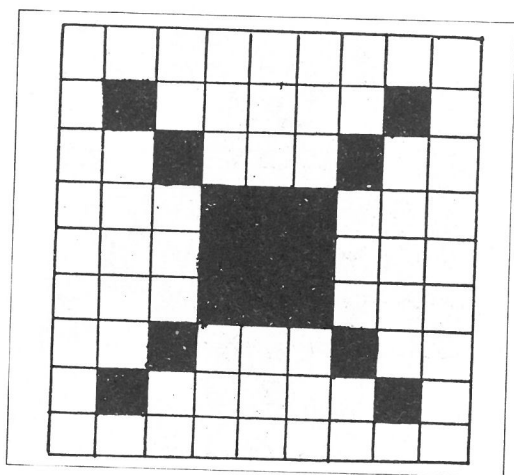
This is an interesting account, where historical facts are combined with symbolic interpretations. Temples were later than domestic shrines. In the remains of the Indus Valley Civilization, we find evidences of domestic shrines : but there is no trace of a public temple. And domestic shrines were later than the

magical procedures (sacrifices and rituals), which came into vogue only at a stage when man felt separated from the supranormal forces. Magical rites, domestic shrines and temple-complexes may, in a sense, be considered as distinct phases of religious evolution; but it would be an error to look upon that evolution as a succession of disappearing and appearing phases. Magical rites, domestic shrines and temple-complexes co-exist in Indian life, and they have always done so. This co-existence has been possible because all three are essentially symbols; and as symbols they do not deny history but transcend it.

Thus it becomes important to recognize that Indian temples have sprung from a traditional symbol that



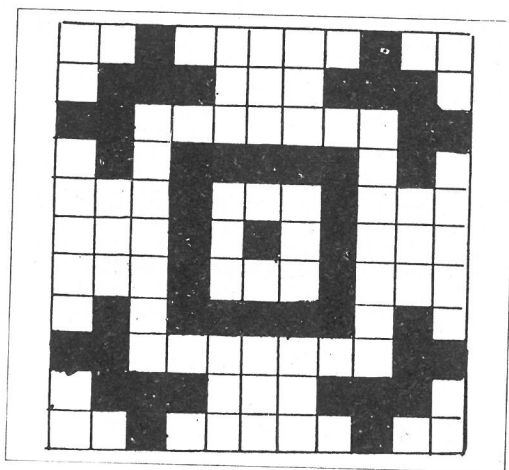
is at once ancient and enduring. The temple would remain an enigma for one who fails to appreciate the content as well as the manifestation of this symbol. For one who stops at the manifestations of this symbol the temple would present itself as 'luminous obscurity' (the expression of Frithjof Schuon, in another context); and one who would be content with considering only the content would see it as 'obscured light'. The symbol is revealed not only by its material manifestation



but also by a vision of its content. The vision in this case is both aesthetic and spiritual.

In order to enable our understanding the aesthetic as well as the spiritual aspects of the temple-symbol, the Indian tradition has crystallized a doctrinal approach which comprehends the idea, the method, and the purpose behind the temple-building activity. The approach is referred to as 'Āgama', which indeed is a generic expression meaning "that which has come from

a hoary past" : it is the ever-active presence of a useful framework for our thoughts and actions, for our growth and fulfilment. 'Āgama' with reference to temple deals with the temple-building activities as well as the procedures of worship in temples. The former appears to emphasize aesthetics, while the latter the spiritual aspect. But the distinction between them is arbitrary and unreal, for Beauty and Serenity cannot in fact be separated.



There are doctrinal formulations in '*Āgama*' regarding the selection of proper land for the temple, the purificatory ceremonies prior to the construction, the plan, 'lay-out', direction, size, relative proportions of the plinth and other structural parts, permissible decorations and embellishments, installation of icons and deities in the sanctum as well as in the niches and pavilions, rituals of daily worship and periodical festivals, purifications and sacramental activities, and so on. These formulations take manifestations and content of the symbol as two complementary elements.

The temple as an incarnation or the symbol is the medium of rituals. Ritual is active thought.

Rituals are actions that lead to contemplation, and contemplation strives to achieve the serenity of consciousness that lifts one from the stress of common life. The *Āgama* focusses attention on the temple as a pattern of rituals. It provides us with a perspective to understand the symbol and act effectively with regard to it. It seeks to construct for us a half-way house between the limitations that we have and the perfection we aim at. Limitations are inherent in human life; we live amidst what pass for the commonplace and the ugly. Perfection is a divine quality; it is also beautiful. The purpose of rituals is to facilitate the passage from the commonplace to the unique, from ugliness to beauty, from what is human to what may be divine.

The *Āgama* has an earlier oral tradition, communicated through generations of craftsmen and priests. It has also a later written tradition, consisting of hundreds of texts and manuals meant for craftsmen and priests. The oral tradition has almost disappeared, for craftsman as well as priests have fallen on decadent days. The texts and manuals have, for the same reason, gone into oblivion, neglected by those for whom they were meant and ignored by others in the community. Fortunately, however, many of these literary works are available, mostly in manuscripts and some of them in print.

The literary tradition comprises of works that are usually classified into three classes : revelations

(*divya*), composition of sages (*muni-prokta*), and writings of ordinary men (*paurusha*). The revealed texts claim a hoary antiquity and have been relied upon by the other two classes of works. The compositions of sages are original works, based on inspiration, intuition and contemplation. They now exist only in citations and fragments. The third group of works is largely in the nature of compilations of relevant passages from the compositions of sages. They employ intelligence and reason, and are also liable to err. They are chronologically recent, and some of them are what the priests and craftsmen mostly have relied upon for several generations now.

The fundamental assumption in this mixed tradition is that Divinity

has two aspects: the hidden and pervasive aspect (*nishkala*), and the manifest and specific aspect (*sakala*). The former is abstract and is likened to oil in the sesasum seeds, fire in fuel, butter in milk, and scent in flower. It is all-pervasive and is settled in the human heart as the 'inner guide' (*antaryāmin*). It has no form, and is not apprehended by sense-organs or by the ordinary mind. The latter, however, is concrete, like fire that has come out of the fuel, or oil that has been pressed out of the seeds, or butter that floats on the surface when milk is churned. It has numerous forms, and man can realize Divinity through these forms; but an act of worship is necessary. The tradition enumerates and describes not only the forms the Divinity may assume

to facilitate man's approach but prescribes rituals that are involved in such an approach. We find in these texts descriptions of icons as visible symbols of Divinity and details of worship with regard to them (*archā*). This in fact is the burden of most of these books. Incidentally, they also discuss associated problems of practical import such as the methods and materials employed in the fashioning of icons, installation of these icons and consecration of temples. Sometimes they expatiate on alternate or accessory approaches such as fire-rituals (*homa*), meditational exercises (*dhyāna* or *yoga*), recitations (*japa*), and intellectual appreciation of spiritual involvement (*jñāna*).

When iconic forms and worship rituals became the principal contents of these texts (especially those texts of accreditedly human origin), there was naturally an introduction of sectarian differences. The three main sects flourishing in India for atleast two thousand years now, Śaiva, Śākta and Vaishnava, developed their own distinctive lineages, their own metaphysical positions, their own deities, and their own rituals of worship. But the essential framework remains common for all of them. And there is a tradition of each sect borrowing freely from the texts belonging to other sects whenever necessary.

There were temples only as sacred enclosures, without an iconic representation of divinity in the

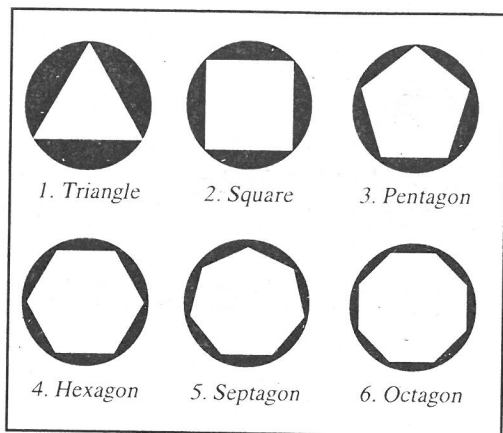
वेदकी			मन्त्र						तन्त्राचार्य	
ईशान	परमेश्वर	जय	ईश	सूर्य	सर्व	भूत	आकाश	अग्नि		
हलि	आष	महीपति					लोहित	पुष्पा		
अरि										
कुंजर	पृथ्वी	ब्रह्मदेवता					सैन	गृहस्थ		
सोम										
मन्त्र										
मुद्रा	रुद्र	लिख					जय	गृह		
नाग										
रोग	वायु	शेष	अमृत	वन्दन	पुष्पदन्त	सुख	द्वारम्भ	विदुः		
वन्दन			विदुः				विदुः			

वन्दन/हलि

विदुः/मन्त्र

वन्दन

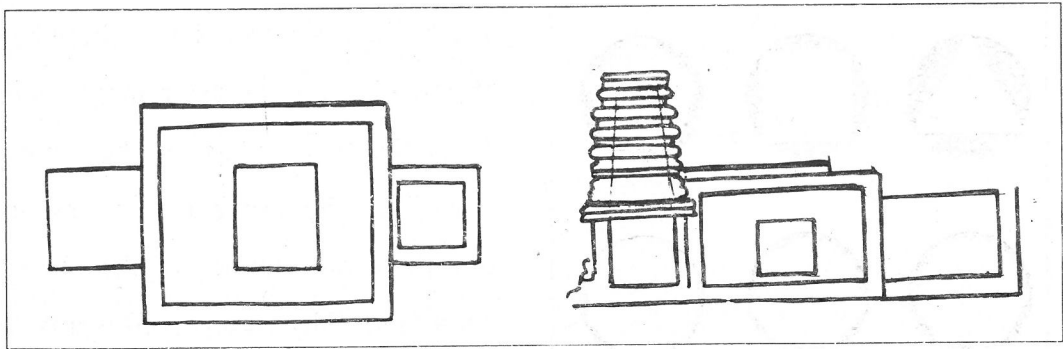
enclosures some had sacred icons within them, and there were temples which later came to possess icons. The Āgama texts, do not regard the situation as paradoxical, because the temple has a sanctity of its own, independent of the icon : and the icon's sanctity on the other hand is dependent on the temple. The Āgama recognizes the sanctum which is prior to the installation of an icon in it as *gr̥ha-garbha* ('house-womb') and the sanctum which is



subsequent to the icon as 'garbha-grha' ('womb-house'). The expression in Sanskrit for shrine, *āyatana* ('abode') signifies that there is in it a power that abides, a sort of container of certain field-forces. Thus, strictly speaking, the shrine could be either an icon (*bimba* or *bera*) or a temple (*mandira*). The temple is in fact regarded as a pattern of powers (*maṇḍala*), even as the human body is. If the body is the 'moving' *maṇḍala* (*chara* or *jangama*), the temple is a 'stationary' one (*achala* or *sthāvara*). The

symbolic correspondance between the two has already been mentioned. If the Tantra emphasizes the human *maṇḍala*, the Āgama focusses its attention on temple as the divine *maṇḍala*. The icon represents a condensation of the same divine force corresponding to the 'soul' in man.

The evidence for the cult of concretely representing the *maṇḍala* occurs even in the Vedic literature. It developed into the stūpa symbolism. Involvement of geometrical forms (square, circle, semi-circle, triangle, polygon and so on) helped in the crystallization of this cult. The *Yoga-tattva-upanishad* spells out the symbolism in terms of the five fundamental elements that constitute the material basis for the entire cosmos. Earth element is



Gaḷaga-nātha temple at Aihole (plan and section)

represented by a square, water by a semi-circle, fire by a triangle, air by a six-angled figure, and ether (sky) by a circle. The point without dimensions (dot, *bindu*) is the focus of all energy. All the other forms are only emanations from it: the icon in the sanctum occupies this position, and the temple should represent the other forms. The architectural details of a sophisticated temple reflects this fundamental symbolism.

The first architect of the stylized temples is imagined to be

the divine creator-sculptor, Viśva-karmā (the 'All-maker'). He is represented as five-faced. Each face has a name, a deity, a colour, an attribute, and a form:

<i>Name</i>	<i>deity</i>	<i>colour</i>	<i>attribute</i>	<i>form</i>
Sadyojāta	Śiva	crystal white	inertia	triangular
Vāmadeva	Vishṇu	blue	knowledge	square
Aghora	Brahmā	reddish	action	circular
Tatpuruṣa	Indra	ash-coloured	mixture of above three	six-angled
Īśāna	Sun	Golden-coloured	pure entity	eight-angled

A combination of the above five forms is represented in a *maṇḍala*, known as *Viśva-karma-*

maṇḍala, which is regarded as fundamental to all temple architecture. The four sides of the *maṇḍala* symbolize the four main directions : and the corners this square represent four mid-directions: and each of the eight quarters is presided over by a deity. The inner circle symbolises the 'creator' (*brahmā*), symbolic of activity'. Guarded by the eight direction guardians, the *maṇḍala* is symbolic of the entire universe. The 'All-maker' (creator) is also the progenitor of the whole mass of scripture, consisting of manuals of architecture, sculpture and painting, known collectively as Āgama. Early temples were reputed to be built by this 'All-maker'.

He had five offsprings : Manu, the first 'man', the 'contemplative'

हिर बुध	हरि	गभीर	गाहन	गहन	शुभ	तान	वृषा शुक्र
वृषा शुक्र	स्कन्द	सूर्य	काम	धातु	विद्या	स्कन्द	विद्या
चर	विद्या	शिशु	इन्द्र	इन्द्र	अग्नि	विद्या	दूत
वृषा शुक्र	धातु	सोम	ब्रह्मा	ब्रह्मा	यम	काम	प्रचेत
संवर	काम	सोम	ब्रह्मा	ब्रह्मा	यम	धातु	धोम
मकर	कुबेर	वीरु	वरुण	वरुण	पित्रि	विद्या	दरि
विष्णु	स्कन्द	विद्या	धातु	काम	काम	स्कन्द	मृत्यु
चर	वृषा	शुक्र	सोम	विद्या	शुक्र	वृषा	शुक्र

Vāstu-maṇḍala with 64 cells (koshtas)

(*man*) man; Maya, the tribal architect or designer (who is reputed in *Mahābhārata* to have designed the assembly hall of Dharmarāja); Tvashṭṛ, the carpenter (who fashioned the trident of Śiva and the discus of Viṣṇu out of the trimmings he made of the Sun); Śilpin, the sculptor, proficient in all the three above crafts, and in addition skilled in metal work, weaving and clay-modelling; Arka (or Viśvajña), the master artisan or smith who worked

with gold and silver. These are the crafts-progenitors and ancestors of guilds. The temple was their craft. It comprehends the five deities, the five qualities, and the five forms. The entire group of factors is pictured in the *maṇḍala* after Viśva-karmā.

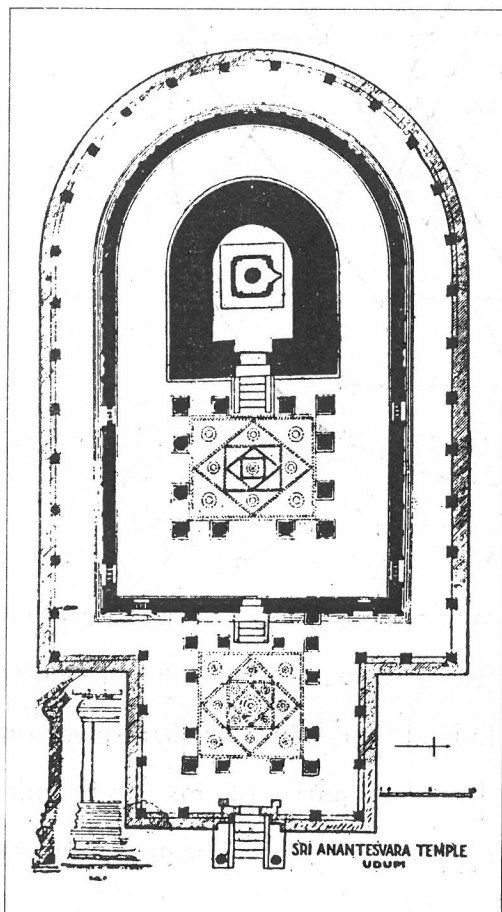
	चोरकी		सकंद					विदुरी	
	ईशान	कर्ण	जय	वृद्ध	सूर्य	सख	भृगु	आक्षि	अक्षि
	दिति	आप	आप	भारोचि	भारोचि	परीक्षि	सावेत्र	सावेत्र	पूषा
	अश्वि	आप	आप	भारोचि	भारोचि	परीक्षि	सावेत्र	सावेत्र	दितक्ष
	कुवर	पुष्टी	पुष्टी	ब्रह्मा	ब्रह्मा	ब्रह्मा	पेन	पेन	गुरुक्ष
आय्या	सोप	पुष्टी	पुष्टी	ब्रह्मा	ब्रह्मा	ब्रह्मा	पेन	पेन	यम
	भृगु	पुष्टी	पुष्टी	ब्रह्मा	ब्रह्मा	ब्रह्मा	पेन	पेन	गुरुक्ष
	सुख	रुद्र	रुद्र	मित्र	मित्र	मित्र	जय	जय	भृगु
	नग	रुद्र	रुद्र	मित्र	मित्र	मित्र	जय	जय	भृगु
	रोग	पाप	रोग	भृगु	भृगु	भृगु	जय	जय	भृगु
पुत्रा				पुत्रा					पुत्रा

Vāstu-maṇḍala with 84 cells (*koshthas*)

Another image that enters into the *maṇḍala* back-ground of the temple is that of the 'lay-out of the building site (*vāstu*). It continues to

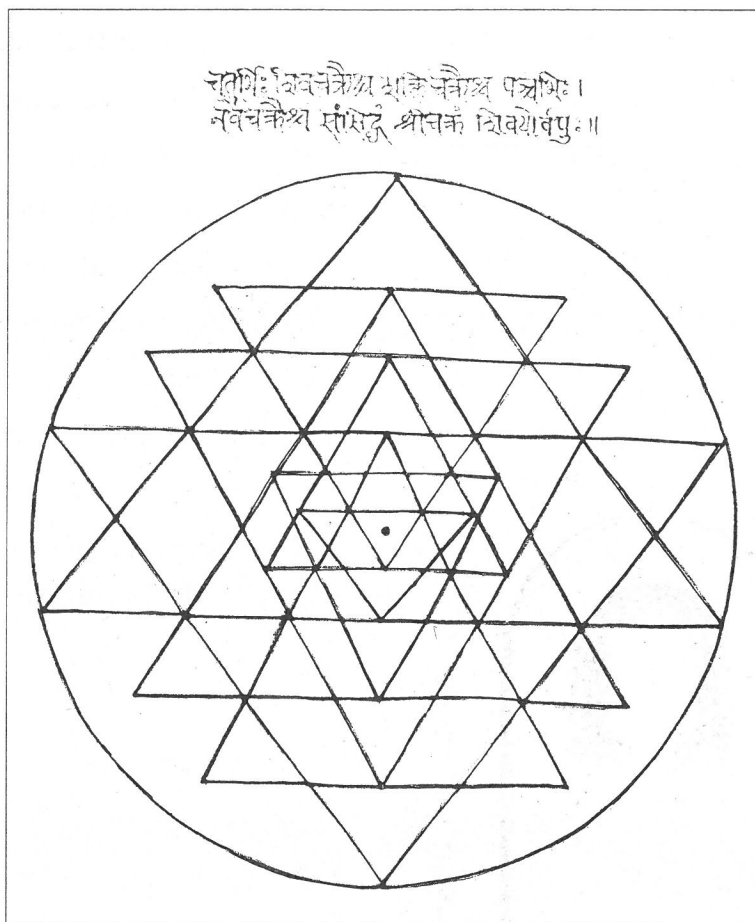
be a custom in India that whenever a building is sought to be constructed, the area on which it comes up is first ceremonially propitiated. The idea is that the extent of the earth necessary for such construction must be reclaimed from the gods and goblins that own and inhabit that area. The ritual is known as 'pacification of the site-deity' (*vāstu-samana*). During this ritual, a *maṇḍala* is employed. It is a square undivided into nine smaller squares on each side, altogether making 81 squares. There is a variant procedure specially meant for temples, according to *Hayaśīrsha-samhitā*, of subdividing each side into eight smaller squares, in which case the total number of cells would be 64. The four sides of the square contain along with them 32 cells, and in each one of

them a deity is invoked and propitiated. The deities include gods like Sun and Indra, spirits like Yama, Gandharva and Nāga, 'demons' like Sin (*Pāpa*) and Disease (*Roga*), ancestors and animals.



The central-most area, consisting of nine cells (a square with three sub-squares on each of its sides), is assigned to Brahma, the supreme deity and the chief object of worship and propitiation. The entire *maṇḍala* is surrounded and guarded by seven demonesses regarded as attendants of the gods. The conception of *vāstu-maṇḍala* appears to be outside the framework of early Vedic religion.

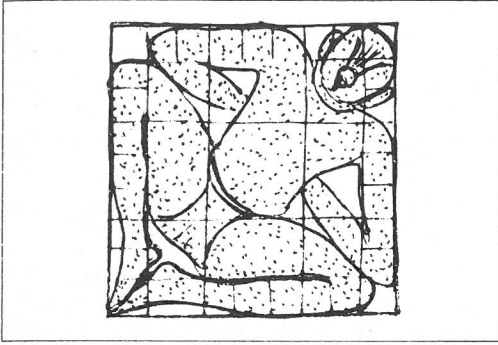
The legend which explains this *maṇḍala* is given in several texts of Indian architecture and also in some Purāṇas (like *Matsya*). The account given in *Rāja-vallabha* (sūtradhāra-maṇḍana) is typical. When Śiva fought fiercely with the terrible demon Andhaka, a drop of sweat fell from Śiva's forehead with a loud thunder on the earth. The drop



Sri-Chakra

assumed the form of a ravenously hungry demon, who attempted devouring the three worlds. The gods and spirits, however, rushed at once on the demon and held him down.

When the demon fell on the ground face downward, the gods and spirits lodged themselves on themselves on different parts of his body and pressed him down. Because the gods

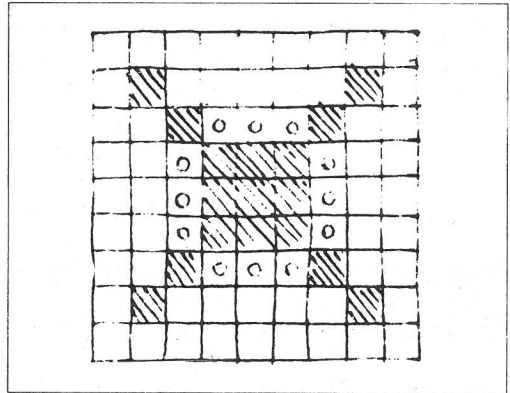


Vāstu-purusha

were lodged on him, the demon came to be called 'Vāstu' ('the lodgement of the gods'); and as his body was spread out on the ground he became the 'recumbent master' (*śayyā-rata-prabhu*). He is pictured as lying down, showing his back, inside the *maṇḍala* with his arms and legs so folded as to cover the whole area, and his head pushed into the north-eastern corner of the square (the *Īśāna* cell). As many as forty-five gods are lodged on his body directly on his limbs and joints. It may be recalled that the mystical

yantra 'Śrī-Chakra' also comprises of forty-five angles. The *maṇḍala* may have had a Tāntrik background.

The word *Vāstu* occurs in the Veda (Rg. 7, 54, 1) and the 'lord of the Vāstu' is identified with the chief of the gods, Indra (*Vāstoshpati*). Even today, during the ritual connected with the pacification of the building-site a hymn is addressed to Indra. Devarāja-yajva, an authority in Vedic interpretation,



Vāstu-maṇḍala from Bṛhat-saṃhitā

looks upon *vāstu* as the mid-region (*antariksha*), and the gaurdians of this are included in the 'Vāstu-deity'. However, the *Vāstu-purusha* has been regarded in later lore as a demon, or at best as a demi-god, whose permission is necessary before any construction can come up on the site. And, at the same time, care is taken to propitiate the deities that hold him down, for it is important that he should not get up.

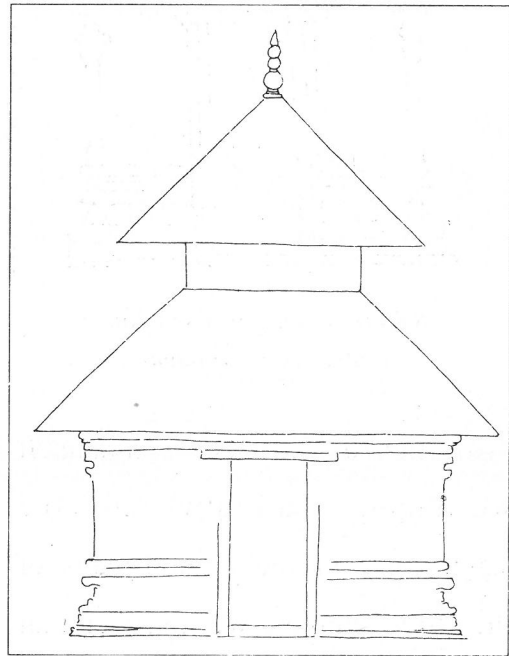
The expression *maṇḍala* is classically employed to denote the air that encompasses the light of the sun and the moon: the orb that spins round the entire cosmos luminously. It thus symbolizes the totality of existence. The form it naturally takes is circular because circle is perfect

and comprehensive. Perhaps the original shape was oval (corresponding to *brahmāṇḍa*, the brahma-egg, or *Hiranya-garbha*, the golden womb), and it was transformed into a circle by a natural process. Associated with this idea was the conjecture concerning the centre of the universe being the mythical mount, Meru, round which were arranged all the continents and islands. Meru was symbolized by the circle and the four quarters that guarded it were represented by forms contained in an enclosing square. The *vāstu-maṇḍala* belongs to this phase of representation; and the central square, which is the position of the chief deity Brahmā, stands for Meru. In the temple architecture, the square sanctum is the outer *maṇḍala*, the *vimāna* on

top of the sanctum is the monumental reproduction of the mount Meru. It is usual for the *vimāna* to comprehend also the several geometrical forms stylized in the *maṇḍala* of Viśvakarmā.

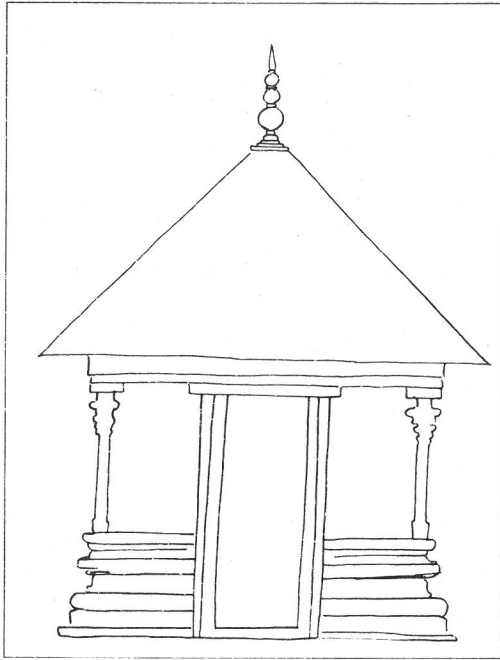
The reason why the sanctum (with the tower) is regarded as the real shrine is that it constitutes the position of Brahma inside the *vāstu-maṇḍala*. The mid-most point inside this central square (where the diagonals meet) is the position of the icon. This point is lifted out of the *maṇḍala* and transformed into the pinnacle (*stūpī*) of the tower above the sanctum. The sanctum, being the central portion of the *maṇḍala* is a condition of concentration of divine energy; and the icon is the very crystallization thereof. The different deities

prescribed to be installed on the *vimāna* represent the several gods and spirits located on the limbs and joints of the site-*maṇḍala* personified. The entire structure is thus a visualization of the *maṇḍala*.



*Superstructure over sanctum
(lūpākāra-vimāna)*

Extension of the sanctum in terms of porch, passages, assembly halls, pavilions and corridors is a



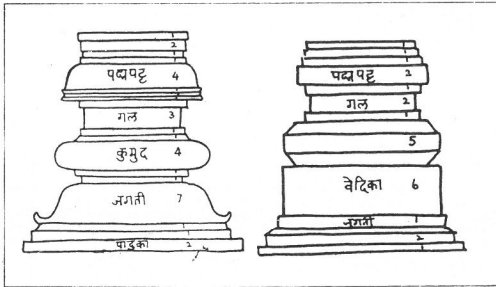
Superstructure over sanctum
(*chhatrākāra-vimāna*)

projection of the basic *maṇḍala*. If we inquire carefully into the significance of the ground-plans of the early temples, we discover that they are merely adaptations of the *maṇḍala* design. We find the conventional and basic forms (triangle, square, rectangle, circle and so on) repeated with variations

in size and simplicity. When a devotee enters the temple, he is actually entering into a *maṇḍala* and therefore participating in the power-field. The field enclosures and pavilions through which he must pass to reach the sanctum are symbolic. They represent phases of progress in the journey of man toward the divine beatitude.

As soon as the devotee sights the threshold of the gateway, he bends down and touches a *maṇḍala* on it before crossing it: this marks for him the transition from the 'way of the world' (*loka-dharma*) to the 'way of God' (*Śiva-dharma*). But he continues to be in the common state of 'wakefulness' until he reaches the flag-post or the 'dispensation-seat'. He then has the first vision of the sanctum, and gets into the state of

‘dream’. As he proceeds towards the sanctum and stands in front of the sanctum (in the vestibule), he sinks into the state of ‘deep sleep’. When he looks at the icon, the higher state of ‘semi-tranquillity’ (*śāntodita*) descends upon him. And when he has suffused himself with the vision of the icon, he gets into the state of ‘tranquillity; (*śānta*).



The altar
belonging to the
Śrī-bhadra type

The altar
belonging to the
Padma-bandha type

In accordance with this scheme of transition, architectural and sculptural details vary from phase to phase in the devotee's onward

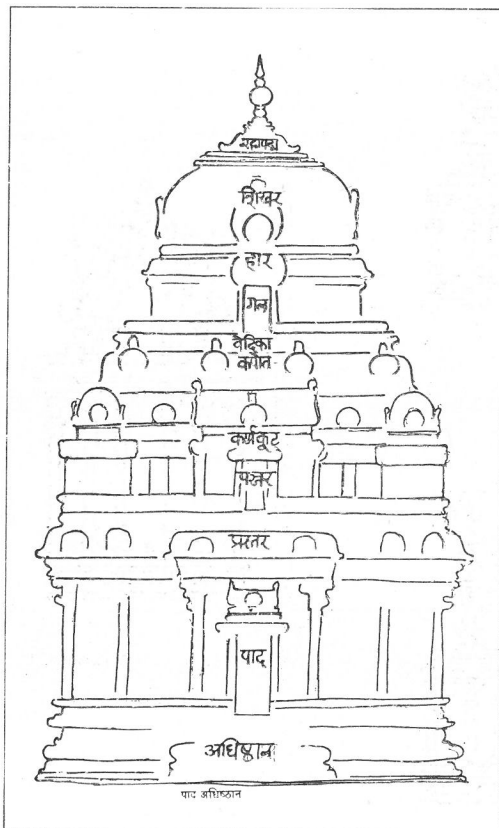
movement towards the sanctum. To signify the worldly aspect of the devotee as he enters the temple, the gateway and the tower over the gateway as well as the niches above the enclosing walls are filled with secular sculptures. The ‘dispensation seat’ is a miniature shrine, with obvious *maṇḍala*-details in it: it lifts the devotee from the common condition of worldliness onto a dream-like vision of the sanctum. The sculptural treatment of the columns and the ceilings, niches and the doorways in the pavilion has a dream-like quality. Mythological themes, legendary subjects, mythical animals, and unusual motifs abound here: they are designed to take one away from dull and common-place reality. The vestibule and the

ambulatory passages are restrained in sculptural decorations, and the prevailing darkness of these areas are suggestive of sleep-like condition. The sanctum with its outer walls divided by simple pilasters and its entrance plainly adorned is expected to lead the devotee further to the condition of 'semi-tranquillity'. It enables attention to be focussed on the icon, with minimal distractions. The interior scheme of the sanctum is altogether plain : it is also dark, but for the oil lamps that lit up the icon. The devotee can here forget all the states and phases that he has passed through and get absorbed in the beauty and serenity of the icon. He is now in 'the inner square of Brahmā' in the *vāstu-maṇḍala* and direct communion with

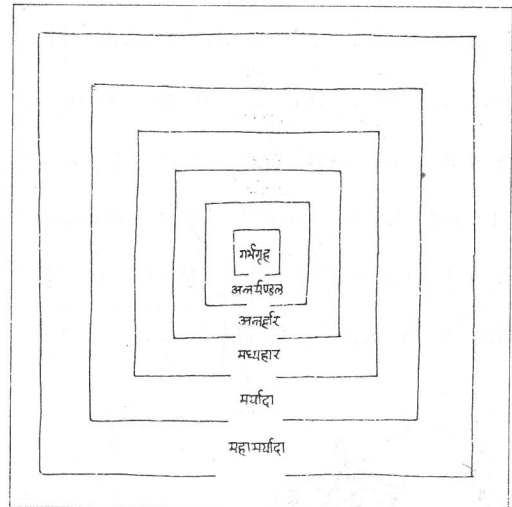
the chief source of power in the temple-*maṇḍala*.

Along the vertical axis, the square sanctum is the *maṇḍala* of wakeful condition, the surmounting *vimāna* (square, circular or polygonal) is the concrete representation of the dream state, and the vase (*kalaśa*) of the deep sleep state. Even as in sleep the distinctions of form disappear, and the variety gets unified, so in the *stūpī* the ascent of forms culminate in a point (*bindu*). The 'pot' of the tower, surmounted by semi-circular lid, is crowned by an upright needle (*sūchi* or *stūpī*). In the Orissan temples, the spheroid or ribbed *āmalaka* is surmounted by semi-circular 'skull' (*khapūri*), over which

rests the pot of the tower. The entire structure of the *vimāna*, resting upon a square base and tapering off into a needle is a remarkable pattern of many *maṇḍalas*, animated by an upward thrust.



Vertical limbs in a *Vimāna*



Divisions of temple enclosure

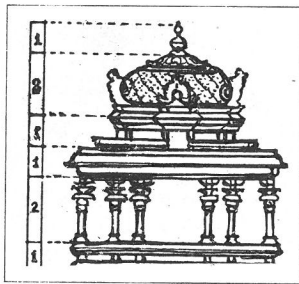
The Āgama of Vaishṇava persuasion has an additional symbolism of the *maṇḍala*. The sanctum represents the concrete and worshipful (*archā*) manifestation of the divine power. The icon inside it is the 'inner controller' (*antaryāmi*), corresponding to the divine presence in the 'heart' of each individual being. The *vimāna* over the sanctum represents the 'glory'

(*vaibhava*) aspect of the divine. The crown-vessel on top of the *vimāna* is 'the patterned expression' (*vyūha*) of the divine power; and pinnacle which vanishes in a point is the 'transcendent' (*para*) aspect.

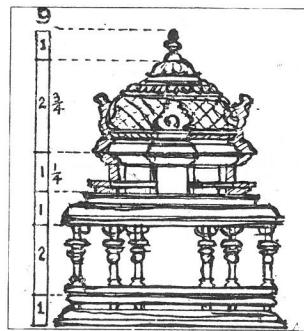
One of the important Āgama texts, *Suprabheda* tells us -

"The Maṇḍala is the very essence of the temple".

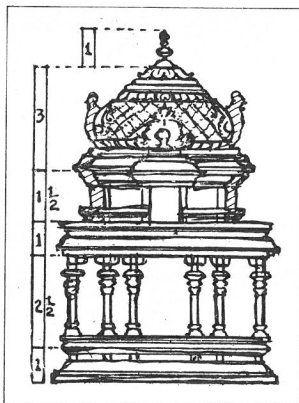
(*charyāpāda*, 2)



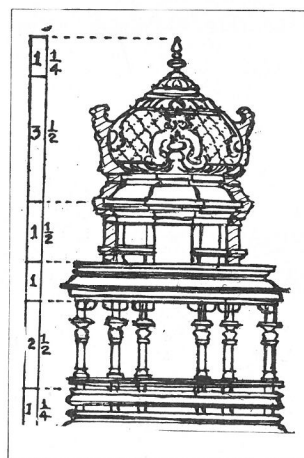
Śāntika ($1 \times 1\frac{1}{2}$)



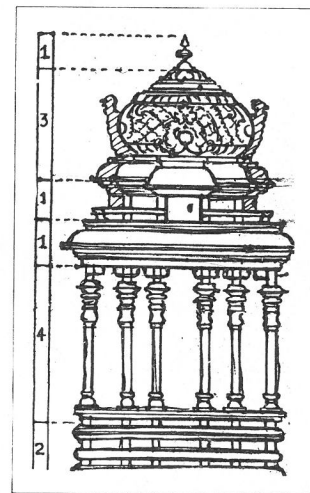
Paushtika ($1 \times 1\frac{1}{2}$)



Jayada ($1 \times 1\frac{3}{4}$)



Adbhuta (1×2)



Sārvakāmika (Shaḍvar)

$1 \times 2\frac{1}{4}$

CHAPTER VIII

THE WORLD OF ICONS

The iconographic involvement in India has been continuous at least for about seven thousand years now. The iconic specimens found in the sites of the Indus Valley civilization and the descriptive hymns dealing with iconic conceptions in the *Rig-Veda* provide the background, however hazy and inadequate, for the nation-wide iconographic tradition that has held the field till this day. But recorded history allows us to have a peep only into the north-western region of India during the sixth century before Christ, when Persian influence was dominant on the region. The next date that raises the curtain from this region is about

320 B.C., when the Macedonian adventurer, Alexander, swooped on the Persian empire and dashed into this corner region of India. Hellenistic impact was in subsequent years felt not only in Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia, but also in this region of India as far as Punjab. An aspect of this impact was the art of making images of gods and heroes.

The art-form that developed in the north-western region (including Bactria on the border) during the days when the Indian princes repulsed the invasions of the Greek generals, has been called 'Gāndhāra',



after the name of the region. Although this art-form is heavily Greeco-Roman, it did not materialize here when the Greeks were in the ascendant. It is only when the Indian princes under the leadership of the Mauryan prince Chandragupta of Magadha (around 304 B.C.), assumed control over the area, allowing the Greeks to reside here as citizens, that the Greek sculptors and artisans were encouraged to exhibit their artistic

talent and temperament. They found it expedient to integrate the Hellenistic craft with the Indian idiom, and this is how Gāndhāra art was born.

The Greek sculptor had an eye for the human figure; he had a penchant for anatomical perfection. He treated gods as robust and prepossessing humans, modelling the body as realistically as possible. He introduced the detail of drapery in a conspicuous manner. The Gāndhāra artist shared this love of the perfect human form, and the tendency towards naturalism. We have a large number of Buddha and Bodhisattva images, both large and small, in relief as well as in the round, answering to the Gāndhāra type in Taxila, Peshawar, Baniyan

(where there is a colossal statue of the Buddha measuring 150 feet in height carved on a rock face), Haḍḍā, and Jalālābad - all in the Gāndhāra region of those days. The statues are designed as if they were meant to be accommodated in an architectural pattern, although free-standing statues of those days are not rare.

But Gāndhāra art is notoriously impersonal. The artists (sculptors, architects and craftsmen) were commissioned to execute works on Buddhist monuments by Indian patrons, especially by the Kushāṇa (Mongoloid) princes. It is unlikely that the artists had much sympathy for the Buddhist themes that they were asked to handle. This becomes evident by the rigidity of most of

the statues belonging to this period. The Buddha images of the Gāndhāra type are more portraits than icons; they scarcely suggest a transcendental feeling or the divine element. That is why the Gāndhāra art was short-lived; and it disappeared after sixty or seventy years, leaving no lineage and no impact.

The early Buddhist monastic settlements were chiefly cenobiums, and did not accommodate any iconic worship of the Buddha, although the lay folk that supported these settlements were given to the worship of numerous spirits and demi-gods (Yakshas). Even when the Buddha images were made, as in the Gāndhāra period, they were intended more as works of art than

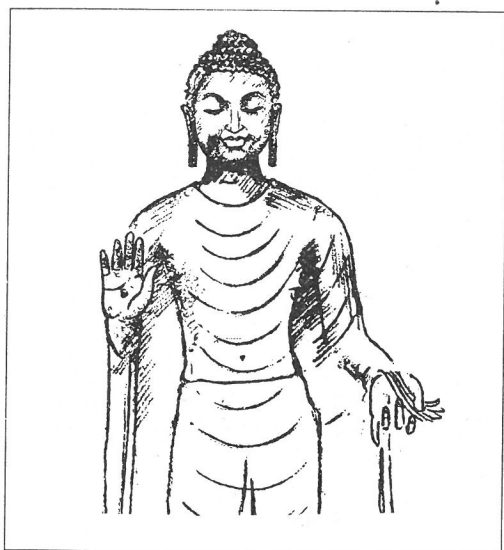
as objects of worship. The relic-worship and the worship of symbolic representations (like foot-print, bodhi-tree, umbrella) were in vogue from early times. When the theme of the Buddha's life and career caught the fancy of sculptors, especially inspired by the Hellenistic models, it was the narrative aspect that was dominant.

During the latter part of the second century, Nāgārjunakoṇḍa in the South, a celebrated Buddhist centre of Mahāyāna persuasion, witnessed the transformation from the aniconic to the iconic representation of the Buddha. A section of the Buddhist monastic assembly, the Mahāsāṅghikas, favoured iconic worship in the shrines of common devotion

(*Chaityas*) in opposition to the more conservative Mahīśāsakas who were against both the shrine idea and iconic representation of the Buddha (although in course of time they conceded the former).

The art-form that emphasized the Indian idiom and tempered the Hellenistic realism with idealistic symbolism that was indigenous to India was the one that developed in the city of Mathurā, about fifty miles south-east of Delhi, when the Gāndhāra-style was half-way through its career. Mathurā, under the Kushāṇas, was an important trade-centre and attracted large concourses of mercantile people owing allegiance to different religious orders. Craftsmen, skilled in the local style of making stylized stone and

metallic icons of folk gods, Buddhist and Jain deities, plied a busy trade.



Preparations of icons for money and sale of icons in shops were known even to Patañjali (on Pāṇini, 5, 3, 99). Mathurā icons now became popular all over the country and even abroad. The great demand necessitated the mass manufacture of icons. The iconography that originated at

Mathurā during this period (first and second centuries after Christ) developed and attained maturity in the golden age of the Guptas (fourth and fifth centuries).

It is interesting that the city of Mathura in those days was frequented by merchants, generals and noblemen from Central Asia, and other parts of northern India (Indus Valley, Taxila, Gujarat, Gulf etc). And there was for centuries, in the city, generous sprinkling of more or less resident foreigners : Greeks of Bactria, Scythians of Central Asia, Parthians of Iran and Kushānas of Mongolia. The craftsmen of Mathurā were thus exposed to numerous extra-Indian influences. Notwithstanding this circumstance, they evolved an



iconographic style that was perfectly indigenous, and that was in complete accord with the idiom that is illustrated in the canonical texts. After a phase of initial development, the subsequent period (marked by the patronage of the Gupta kings) saw a large number of canonical works in Sanskrit in the nature of iconographic manuals (*pratimā-lakṣhaṇas*).

It was about the same time that temples also began to be built in a manner that was different from the *stūpa*, *chaitya* or *vihāra*. It was about the same time too that the Bhāgavata cult was making a headway in the mainland of India. And it was about the same time that the nucleus of the Purāṇas had been formed and the myths and legends of gods were becoming popular. The folk deities as well as the divinities of the sophisticated classes had risen in importance : they needed elaborate shrines and complicated rituals of worship.

Āgama as the prescriptive temple-literature took shape in answer to this demand. There was an Āgama corpus in Tamiḻ already. It had got formed during the early

centuries before and after Christ (from 500 A.D., according to V.R. Ramachandra Dīkshitar and M.A. Mehendale). The Āgama of all India relevance was naturally influenced by the Tamiḷ Āgama.



The Vedic hold had to an extent slackened, and the Tāntrik framework gradually assumed considerable importance. Worship in

a temple is of course not entirely a Vedic idea although icon-worship is undoubtedly mentioned in *Rgveda* (1,155,1). There were no public temples even in the earlier Indus Valley phase, although there were household icons. Now the elaborate Vedic rituals and sacrifices as community affairs receded to the background, and the temple as a public place of worship was taking its place.

There is a curious inscription (EC XXII, P.204) found in Ghosunḍi (Nāgarī) near Chittore (Rājasthān), belonging to the second century B.C., which mentions that the King Gājāyana, a bhāgavata who had also performed an *aśvamedha* sacrifice, got a temple (Nārāyaṇa-vāṭikā) for Vāsudeva and Saṁkarshaṇa.

- (1) कारितोयं राज्ञा भागवतेन गाजायनेन
पाराशरीपुत्रेण स -
- (2) वर्तातेन अश्वमेधयाजिना
- (3) अनिहताभ्यां सर्वेश्वराभ्यां पूजाशिलाप्राकारो
नारायण वटिक

The inscription suggests the co-existence of Vedic rituals of a collective nature and the temple as a religious institution during the initial phases of this transformation. It was in this context that the Āgama developed.

The bhāgavata cult, which advocated devotion to the iconic representation of Vishṇu, encouraged the building of public shrines. Even in the first century A.D., we have an inscriptional reference (EC XXIV P.194) to a 'sacred shrine' (*mahā-sthāna*) at Mathurā dedicated to the

“worshipful Vāsudeva”, during the reign of the Śaka satrap Shoḍāsha, son of Rājūvala; we have also references to the icons of the five worshipful heroes of the Vṛishṇī clan” installed in this shrine.

- (1) महाक्षत्रपस राजुवलस पुत्र स
- (2) भगवतां वृष्णीनां पंचवाराणां प्रतिमाः
शैलदेवदं...
- (3) अचदिशां शैलं पंच ज्वलत इव परमवपुषा...

The cult became wide-spread during the rule of the early Gupta Kings. Samudragupta performed an *aśvamedha*-sacrifice, but his son Chandragupta II styled himself a “parama-bhāgavata”. The Varāha-Vishṇu temple in Udayagiri near Bhilsa was a bhāgavata shrine of 402 A.D. A rock inscription dated 404 A.D. at Mandsor by Nara-Varman, a feudatory of the Gupta

King, begins with a verse which transforms the Vedic *purusha* into a personal iconic deity.

सहस्रशिरसे तस्मै परुषायामिततेजसे ।

चतुः समुद्रपर्यङ्कतोयनिद्रालवे नमः ॥

The bhāgavata-cult began with an adoration of Viṣṇu, but its basic creed of devotion (*bhakti*) drew within its fold other popular gods also. The later Guptas were devoted to Śiva (*parama-māheśvaras*) almost exclusively. Even Patañjali, the commentator on *Pāṇini* (5,3,99), was acquainted with “Śiva-bhāgavatas”, and the early Kushāṇa princes got “Śiva-sthalas” (shrines to Śiva) built as early as the first century after Christ. There are several inscriptions in Kharōṣṭhi which mention this, and there are several early coins (as those of the

Indo-Parthian ruler Gondophares and the Kushāṇa prince Wemā Kādphises) which unmistakably bear iconic representations of Śiva. Besides the later Gupta Kings, Bhāraśivas and the Vākāṭaka rulers, the Hūṇa generals Maitrikas of Valabhī, and the Maukhari chiefs of Kanoj encouraged the Śiva-bhāgavata cult.

The innumerable folk divinities were accommodated within the general ideology of Bhāgavata, which was the impulse to partake of the grace and glory of godhead (as the etymological meaning of the word *bhakti*, from the root *bhaj*, suggests). The icons of the Buddha and the *budhisattvas* were already being revered. The icons of *tīrthankaras* (perfected saints guiding

humanity) were objects of adoration among the adherents of the Śramaṇa-tradition (Jains); these iconic saints were accompanied by folk divinities (*yakshas* and *yakshiṇīs*).

With the spread of the cult of devotion to personal gods and goddesses, the Āgama manuals attempted a classification of deities and stylization of their iconic forms. By about the fifth century after Christ, Indian iconography was more or less finalized and formalized. Technical development in metal-craft also reached a stage of maturity, so that casting of metallic icons began to be attempted on a mass scale. The class of workers known as *sthapathis*, involved in the preparation of icons, came to be well-established.

The expression 'icon' in the word Iconography was evolved in the West mainly in a Christian context. The Greek original of this expression, viz., *eikon*, means a likeness, an image, a representation of something that is valuable. Greek Christianity encouraged objects of worship, like the crucifix, that could be carried about ceremoniously in cultic festivals. This practice is derived from pre-historic fetishes and totem-objects that we find all over the world. Man not only loves to manufacture icons as representative and symbolic, but has a necessity for them. An icon is what is constructed and also what is utilized. It not only delights, but serves a purpose.

There is a pretty legend concerning Pygmalion, the clever



The Egyptian deity Isis in Abidas temple

Greek sculptor. He once made an image of a woman in stone, and it was so life-like that he at once madly fell in love with the woman in stone. The love that he bore to this statue was so intense and genuine that Venus took pity on him and infused life into the statue. The sculptor married her and lived with her happily. The legend has a point. The image that serves as an icon must

be artistically perfect and realistic : it must have a profound appeal to the onlooker or the devotee. And it must be meaningful to him.

The portable crucifix as an icon, for instance, has value only when it is meaningful. Its value consists in reminding us of the person of Jesus Christ, representing the event of crucifixion and signifying the idea of redemption. It is only then that it becomes an object of veneration. An icon has a religious significance as well as artistic merit. The pre-historic fetishes, funeral poles, ancestral images, totem-tablets and sacred stones are meaningful to the tribes in which they operate : they direct the magical practices of the tribe, and also delight the folk that surround them.

Their forms may appear crude and frightening to us, but we must remember that these icons were not designed to please us. We should not expect the artistic quality of these objects of worship to conform to our norms of beauty; it is enough if it accords well with the traditional pattern current in the tribe, for that is what matters.

An icon is, therefore, in the nature of a paradigm. The idea of a paradigm, popularized by Thomas S. Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago 1962), involves an assumption derived from a specific achievement, and the sharing of this assumption in a community, which act of sharing will facilitate co-ordinated effort. A paradigm is a framework; it has a

blinding function, in the sense that it prevents the user of this framework from wasting his time and energy on trivial issues, and helps concentrate on relevant and specific issues. It brings into being a way of looking at things naturally, meaningfully and purposefully; and it develops its own language. "A paradigm", in the words of Margaret Masterman, "is something which can function when the theory is not there" (*Criticism and Growth of Knowledge*, Cf. Lian Hudson, *The Cult of the Fact*, London, 1973). It is like a local roadmap, which is used when it is needed and which is meaningful when relied upon.

A paradigm works, especially when it is shared in a community. And success of the paradigm

provides delight to the users of the paradigm; and “humans become emotionally attached to what gives them pleasure”. The role of an icon in a tribe is exactly the same. It binds the members of the tribe in a generality of understanding, and helps them communicate with each other as well as function within a framework. Its relevance and value are confined to the community which has generated it and within which it operates.

An icon as an object of reverence satisfies not only the religious impulses of its user, but the artistic expectations also. It thus develops a ‘vital quality’, and a ‘protective role’. No user of the icon can derive any benefit from it unless he regards it as imbued with a living

quality and unless he has trust in its especial, although unseen powers. An icon is a ‘charm’ : it can work. The earnestness and concentration of the user of the icon determines how the icon is going to benefit him. Was it not the mad love of Pygmalion that prompted Venus to give him the woman that he loved, out of the inert stone that he skillfully carved?

The temple is a structure designed to house an icon, which is both an object of veneration and a work of art. The icon in the temple has a cult, a tradition, a function that is laid down as paramount within the community. The Indian words for icon are ‘pratimā’, ‘bimba’ and ‘bera’. ‘Pratimā’ emphasizes representation of the actual object of veneration (divinity); ‘bimba’

brings out the character of image; and 'bera', the origin of which word is obscure, means an idol in which certain traits and powers are especially invoked. There is another synonym, 'mūrti', that is sometimes used; it signifies person-ification, incarnation, formation. It is making an abstract idea concrete and practical.

The word *pratimā* is an ancient one, found even in the Vedic hymns (e.g. *Rg-Veda* 10, 10, 130). It had become popular in the centuries just preceding the Christian era, for we find it used in the sense of icons in several inscriptions belonging to the second and first centuries before Christ. For instance, an inscription of this date on the pedestal of a stone image of Maṇibhadra (a folk god) has been found in Pol near

Gwalior (in Madhya Pradesh); and another in a well in Morā near Mathurā (Uttar Pradesh) which mentions the icons of the five heroes of the Vršṇī clan (Sankarshaṇa, Vāsudeva and others). The *Rg-Veda* (6, 28, 6) employs another word 'su-pratīka' in the same sense as 'pratimā'.

'Bimba' and 'bera', however, are more frequently employed in the Śilpa texts. They are specifically sculptures in stone, wood, clay or metal, as distinguished from *lekhyā* (coloured line-drawing) and *chitra* (painting). 'Bera' in particular refers to the variety of icons worshipped in temples in the context of different rituals. We do not know whence this word was derived, for it is clearly not a regular Sanskrit word.

Agastya samhitā classifies icons into three types : (1) Chitra (sculpture in the round); (2) Chitrārdha (relief); and (3) Chitrābhāsa (painting or drawing). The first is said to be the best.

कालयोगप्रमाणेन कर्तव्या प्रतिमा शुभा ॥
 त्रिविधं प्रतिमा प्रवक्ष्यते ॥
 चित्रं चाप्यर्धचित्रं च चित्राभासं तथैव च ।
 दृश्यमानोऽवयवा यस्य प्रतिमायाः समन्ततः ।
 मानोन्मानप्रमाणानि ॥ -
 शिलागताया यस्यास्तु पृष्ठभागो न दृश्यते ।
 मानप्रमाणयुक्तानां सार्धचित्रमिति श्रुतम् ॥
 या स्थितालेख्यरूपाणि लिखिता .. ।
 हीनप्रमाणयुक्ता सा चित्राभासस्तथोच्यते ॥

Also,

उत्तमं च बलं चित्रं मध्यमं चार्धचित्रकम् ।
 आलेख्यमधमं प्रोक्तं प्रतिमाकर्मणि क्रमात् ॥

The employment of icons in India can be traced in the oldest strata of her recorded history. Besides the cultic images discovered in the remains of the Indus Valley

civilization, many of the numerous steatite seals that we find in the same sites are clearly iconic in function. It is unfortunate that the legends upon the seals have not yet been deciphered; for without an understanding of the legends it is impossible to determine the iconic significance of the seals.

One of the seals has become justly famous, although its enigmatic character has not been relieved by



The Indus-Seal representing a divinity identified frequently as Śiva-paśupati

a convincing explanation. It is the seal found in Mohenjo-dāro representing a three-faced (?) male deity with horns, seated on a stool (*āsandi*) in a yogic posture, surrounded by four animals (elephant, tiger, rhinoceros and buffalo), and with two antelopes under the stool. The deity has been variously identified as Paśupati-Śiva (R.N. Dandekar), an earlier prototype of Śiva (Father Heras), the Fire-god or Agni (B.A. Saletore), an earlier form of Viṣṇu (T.G. Aravamuthan), the creator-sculptor Tvashṭr-Viśvarūpa (S.Śrīkaṇṭha Śāstri), the Killer-god Kuejas (Hrozng), and some buffalo-headed composite deity (K.N. Sastri). The supposed nudity of the figure is explained as ithyphallicism and F.O. Schröder is impressed by its

similarity with the Celtic god Cernunnos. (Cf R.N. Dandekar : *Some aspects of the History of Hinduism*, University of Poona, 1967).

The precise identity, however, will not be possible until the six or seven letters that are inscribed above the figure are read. Whatever deity the seal represents, it is clear that it is iconic. It must obviously have had a religious purpose to fulfil; and its artistic value can readily be seen even today. There are many seals like this. The deities in human and animal representation, divinities as trees and plants, and the ritualistic observances in connection with them are typical factors involved in icon-making, and we find them in these seals. The seals were also meant to

be carried about, either as charms (or talisman) or as possessions on the person of the owner.

The religion reflected in the Vedic literature does not make much of veneration of icons (*iconoduly*), although it is doubtless acquainted with icons (*pratimā or pratīka*). Icons would have been in use by the folk, as they were during the days of the Indus Valley civilization. Vedic age was in most respects a continuation of this earlier age. It is becoming increasingly evident that there is no ground for the distinction that used to be made between Dravidian and Āryan races as distinguishing the Indus and Vedic civilizations respectively.

The Vedic hymns refer to charms and talismans, magical

powers and cultic images. Their pre-occupation appears to have been with nature and abstract divinities, and not with physical representations of the forces of nature or of divinities derived from nature's nucleus. The Vedic hymns did, however, crystallize the symbols (such as wheel, umbrella, spear, foot-print, lotus, noose, goad and vehicles) which helped the iconographic development in a later age.

The idea of the multiplicity of divinities and legendary accounts of aspected deities which are basic to Indian Iconology are also Vedic. The former is evidenced in the remains of the Indus Civilization also, while we have no means of ascertaining the latter in the same context. The gods numbered 3339 (Cf. *Rg-Veda*

3,9,9,) but they were all aspects of a much smaller number of deities (only three in *Rg-Veda*, e.g., 10, 158, I, Agni, Indra and Sūrya). The hymnal outlook is henotheistic (to use the expression coined by F. Max-müller) : the god to whom the hymn was addressed was regarded as the highest of gods, even as the only God in reality, all other deities being regarded as aspects thereof.

But the folk religion that continued in the Vedic period and has survived till today, accepted in practice, whatever the theoretical reservations, as many as 330,000,003 gods! The staggering figure may indeed be a fanciful extension of the Vedic number 33, which is credited with some validity in the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* and other

early scriptural texts. The thirty-three gods were earth and the heaven, twelve aspected solar energies (*ādityas*), eleven frightening forces of the atmosphere (*rudras*) and eight deities of the directions (*vasus*). They were obviously symbolic.

There is another explanation of the number, which accommodates eleven deities in each of the three spheres (the earth, the mid-region or atmosphere and the heavenly vault). It should be noted that the thirty-three divinities gradually got condensed into three, each representing a sphere (*tri-daśa*), even in the Vedic literature: as, for instance, the conception of the triad, Agni (Fire on earth), Vāyu (Wind in midregion) and Sūrya (Sun in the

heavenly vault). This provided the background for the evolution of the triad of the popular religion in later India, Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu.

Polytheism is a fact in Indian religion, and the attempt that is frequently made to show that Indian thought is committed ultimately to monotheism is not only misconceived but irrelevant. Theism is a matter of religious practice, and not a philosophical tenet. Whatever conclusion the Vedānta arrives at is valid, not for the common folk, but for the 'superior' individuals who are able to transcend the confines of theistic involvement. Common people worship a variety of gods, for a variety of purposes, in a variety of ways. The idea of godhead is relevant only in the context of needs

and fears, aspirations and aversions, pleasures and pains.

The nature and content of Vedic hymns make this point explicit, and the outlook of these hymns is decidedly polytheistic. The Vedāntic wisdom advocated the idea of 'monism' (the ultimate reality of the absolutely one principle), which also has its roots in the Vedic hymns. It is unfortunately not often recognized that in India monism and polytheism have always co-existed, and that they do not contradict each other. Monism is a matter of conviction of the reality of one principle, while polytheism is concerned with practical approaches to aspected divinities.

And polytheism is fundamental to Indian iconography, or, for that

matter, to any iconography in the world. For it is only an aspected divinity that can be concretely represented, or worshipped. Making an icon involves the understanding of Godhead in terms of shapes and traits, personalities and powers. Even in the Vedic hymns, the various gods are endowed with different personalities. Man truly makes gods in his own image. The process of crystallization of traits in gods facilitated the creation of iconic models. The icon is a condensed word-image. That is why an icon in India is always accompanied by a descriptive and mnemonic verse known as *dhyānā-śloka* containing the essential features of the icon (traits, weapons, postures and powers).

In course of time, while the folk continued to worship countless deities and spirits, the sophisticated people accepted the group of five deities (the four subordinated to one) for worship : Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śakti, Sūrya (the Sun) and Gaṇapati. The five constituted a family (*pañchāyatana*), free from confrontation. But different groups insisted on different patterns in this family. And depending on which of the five deities was accorded the dominant role, there was a five-fold division of sects.

Thus, there were those who worshipped Viṣṇu as the major deity, the other four being subordinated to him, and they came to be designated as 'Vaishṇavas' (with as many as 139 sub-sects,

occasioned by historical, geographical and social factors). Likewise, there were 'Śaivas' (with 103 sub-sects), accepting the superior status of Śiva; 'Śāktas' (with 17 sub-sects), who worshipped Śakti in the main; Sauras (with nine sub-sects) given to Sun-worship; and 'Gāṇapatyas' (with eleven sub-sects) who worshipped Gaṇapati in the main. Whatever the affiliation, the ritual invariably involves a degree of syncretism.

There were also composite deities, conceived by the more tolerant and less exclusive. We have images of Viṣṇu-Śiva (Śankara-nārāyaṇa, Hari-hara), Viṣṇu-Sūrya (Sūrya-nārāyaṇa), Viṣṇu-Śakti (Lakṣmī-nārāyaṇa, Śrīnivāsa), Śiva-Śakti (Hara-Gaurī, Umā-Maheśvara, Ardhanārīśvara), and Gaṇapati with



*Ganeśa in a standing posture
bronze image*

emblems of one or all of the other four deities. And each of these five deities came to have in due course numerous presentational forms (*līlā-mūrtis*), designed principally out of legendary material, but not infrequently occasioned only by the artist's fancy.

The icons being concrete, there was a natural tendency for the forms

to get crystallized into traditional patterns. The making of icons became a professional detail; there were not only guilds of craftsmen but castes into which craftsmen were born. There was then need for instructional literature concerning the theoretical and practical aspects of iconography (which literally means providing drawings and sketches for the making of icons). And the need was fulfilled in an ample measure. There is now an elaborate literature in Sanskrit which deals with the nature of gods, their images and manifest forms, the craft and technical procedures in the manufacture of icons, the details of rituals associated with the worship, and the legends that provide the background.

As a necessary aspect of standardization, the form of the icons was sought to be clearly defined in terms of anatomical proportions, postures, and the weapons in the hands. The axiomatic assumption that prevailed for all time was that beauty in an icon is derived solely from the measurements prescribed in the canons (*Mānasāra*, 51,70)-

शास्त्रमानेन यो रम्यः स रम्यो नान्य एव हि ।

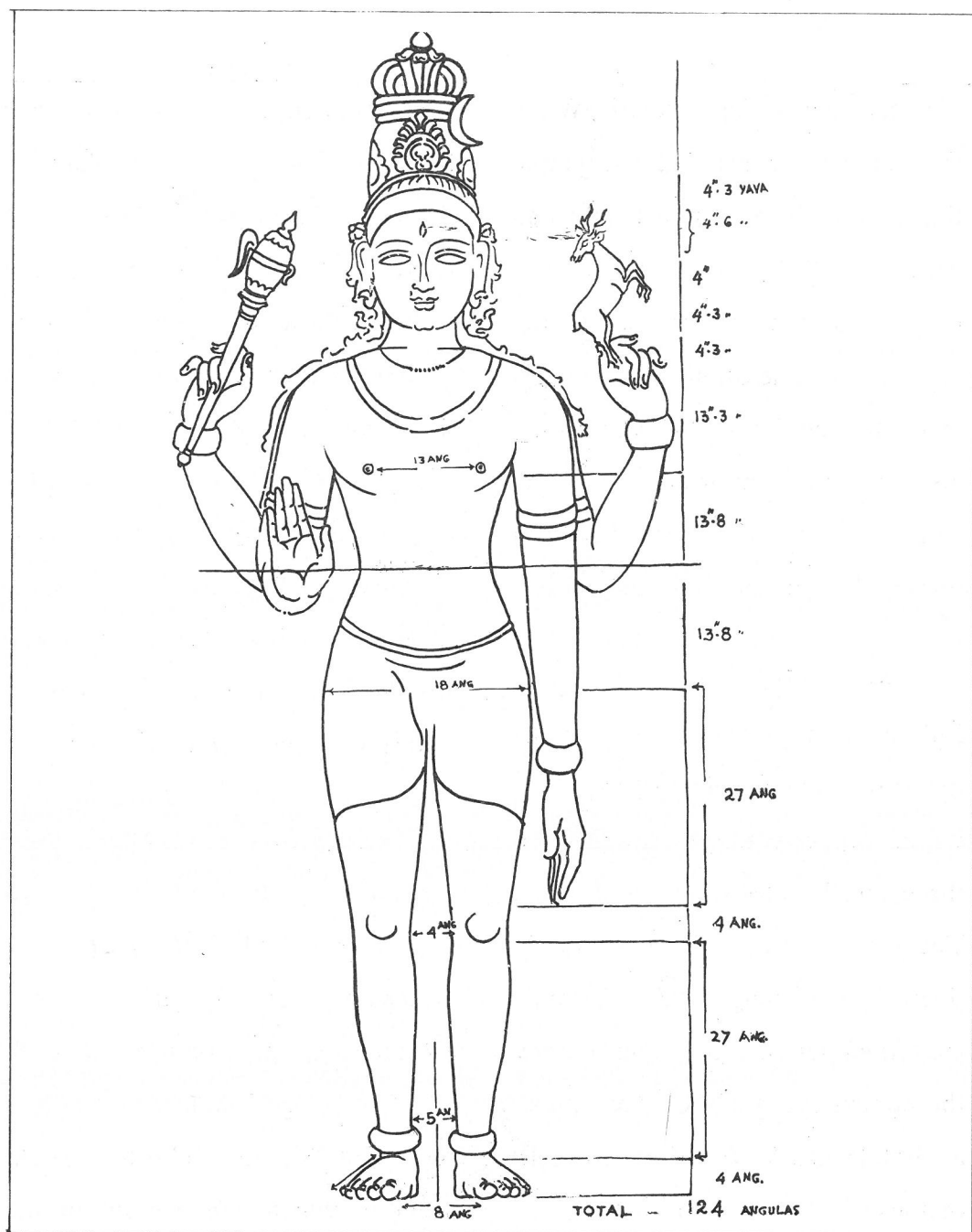
Thus iconic measures loomed large in the training of the *sthapati*. The iconometry, as standardized, takes into account the most proper height of the icon (*māna*), the breadth (*pra-māṇa*), the circumference (*pari-māṇa*), surface of the image (*lamba-māna*), thickness (*un-māna*) and the space

between limbs (*upa-māna*). When the icon is to be installed in a temple that is already built, the height and breadth of the temple, and the size of the main door are among the relevant considerations. Some texts insist that the donor's measurements also become important when he causes the icon to be installed in a temple he himself has built.

An indispensable concept in Indian iconometry is the 'inch-measure' (*mānāṅgula*) as the unit, which approximates roughly to three-fourths of the common inch. The iconometric 'inch' increases in degrees, beginning with the atomic size (*paramāṇu*), which is unseen by the human eye. Eight of these make a 'mobile speck' (*trasa-reṇu*); eight of these in turn is equal to the 'tip of a thin hair' or the hair on the

head, (*vālāgra*); eight of these make the 'tip of a coarse hair', hair on the body (*romāgra*); eight of these make an 'egg of a louse' (*liksha*); eight of these represent the length of the louse itself (*yūka*); eight of these will make the size of a barley grain (*yava*). Eight of the barley grains constitute a 'superior' (*uttama*) 'inch measure'; seven of them is regarded as 'midling' (*madhyama*), and six of them is 'inferior' (*adhama*).

Constituted by the 'inch-measures' we have other measures such as the 'cubit' (*kishku*) which is twenty-four *angulas* (about eighteen of the common inches), the 'bow-length' (*dhanus*) which is four 'cubits', the 'churning-stick' (*daṇḍa*), which is a variant of the above, and so on.



Uttama Daśa-tāla

There is also the measure known as 'mātrāṅgula', (or 'dehāṅgula'), the inch which corresponds to the length of the middle division of the middle fingure of the sculptor who makes the icon or the patron who commissions it. By a combination of these two 'inch-measures' (*mānāṅgula* and *mātrāṅgula*), we have the familiar practical measure in vogue.

The major gods like Viṣṇu and Śiva are prescribed to be made in the 'superior' *daśa-tāla* (ten-*tāla*-measure), viz. 124 *mātrāṅgulas* in height from the top of head to the soles of the feet. Goddesses like Lakshmī, Sarasvatī and Pārvatī should measure to the 'midling' *daśa-tāla* viz., 120 *mātrāṅgulas*. When they stand they should reach up to the lower tip of their male

consorts' ear. The 'inferior' *daśa-tāla* is meant for minor deities like Garuḍa, Śeṣha, Skanda, and guardians of the eight quarters; the height would be 116m. The nine-*tāla* measure (*nava-tāla*) equals 108m., and it is the measure for making the icons of the demi-god Indra and demons. There are varieties in this *tāla*-measure : *navārdha-tāla* (114m.) for the planetary divinities; *uttama-nava-tāla* (112 m) for sylvan deities (*yaksha*), celestial musicians (*gandharva*), and dragons (*uraga*); and *sattryaṅgula-nava-tāla* (111 m.) for great human beings.

In Indian iconography, the head of the image merits the most careful attention of the sculptor, for it is the 'major limb'. In all the varieties of *tāla*-measure, iconometric details

are minutely prescribed in the texts. The face is divided into three equal divisions, the first from the front hair line to the eye-brow-meet, the second from the eye-brow-meet to the tip of the nose, and the third from the tip of the nose to the bottom of the chin. If we use the nine-*tāla* measure (108m.) which is most often used, then height of the face would be 12m., each division thereof being 4m., from neck to the middle of the breast-line 12m., from these till the navel 12m. and so on.

Measurements vary according to the subject-matter (gods, spirits, human beings, animals, etc). And each subject-matter has numerous categories. For instance, if the icon is that of a human being, five types are recognized : 'hamsa' (superhumans, kings, human

incarnations of the divinities), 108m.; 'bhadra' (sages, royal priests, chief ministers etc.) 106m.; 'mālavya' (wedded wives, heavenly musicians, dragons etc) 104m.; 'ruchaka' (nymphs, dancers, actresses etc) 100m.; and 'Śaśaka' (well-known mortals), 96m. There are also other characteristic delineations such as webbed hands and feet, a lump on the forehead, forelocks turned rightward and three lines on the palm for celebrated human beings.

Even the aniconic representations of the *linga* are subject to well-defined iconometric prescriptions. Lingas are of thirty-three kinds, grouped into three main categories according to their iconometric specifications. The 'best' lingas made in stone must measure

nine to seven cubits (*hasta*) in height, the 'midling' ones six to four cubits, and the 'inferior' ones three to one. A stone *linga* which is under one foot high does not merit worship in a public place. If the *linga* is a crystal one, the 'best' may be 18' to 13' high, the 'midling' 12' to 7' and the 'inferior' 6' to one inch (*Īśāna-śiva-guru-deva-paddhati*, 40).

Nāradiya-samhitā (23, 110) recommends that an icon in stone, bronze or wood should be made in the nine-*tāla* measure or the ten-*tāla*. For the worship rituals (known as *karmārchā*), the icon should be in metal, and should not be taller than twelve *angulas* nor shorter than six.

Iconometry figures prominently with respect to two parts of the

shrine, although they are strictly not icons : *kalaśa* (finial) and *bali-pīṭha* (altar). Accounts of these parts have already been given earlier. And it has been shown that these two structures are intimately associated with the icon in the sanctum. But the measures here are in terms of 'parts' (*aṁśas*), and 'levels' (*talas*). For instance, the finial known as *kāma-kumbha* is composed of six 'levels' and the total measure is 15 1/2 'parts'. The 'foot-hold' (*pada-grāhi* or base) will be two parts, the 'egg' (*aṇḍaka*) five, the 'neck' (*grīva*) two, 'lotus motif' (*padma-patrika*) three, the (*karṇikā*) two and a half, and the top-most unit (*bījapūra*) one part.

The altar may be carved out of stone, made in bricks or cast in metal, according to *Pādma-Samhitā*

(30, 140). The height of the altar in front of the sanctum should bear a definite proportion to the height of the sanctum itself. One eighth of the sanctum is considered the best; it may also be one seventh or one fifth. Breadth of the altar is also determined likewise.

There is another reckoning which suggests that the height of the altar should be equal to the height of the pedestal on which the icon in the sanctum is consecrated. And accordingly, many types of altars are enumerated and named in the manuals like *Śilparatna*, *Pādma-samhitā* and *Vishvakṣena-tantra*. Limbs or levels of the altar are also designated and the measurements given. There are several altars like the Mahā-pīṭha (21 'parts'), Śrī-bhadra (32 'parts'), Sarvota-bhadra

(35 'parts') and Śrī-vijaya (37 'parts'), which receive elaborate consideration in the craft-manuals.

It may be noted that the altar usually consists of many mouldings, and texts like *Tantra-samucchaya* divide the total height of the altar into ten parts: 'foundation' (*pādukā*) at the bottom, 'platform' (*jagatī*) on top of it, and on successive tiers 'flower-pattern' (*kumuda*), 'flower-slab' (*kumuda-paṭṭikā*) 'shoulder-blade' (*gala*), 'neck' (*kambu*), 'dove-row' (*kapota*), 'top-slab' (*agra-paṭṭi*), and 'lotus' (*padma*), which is the top-most member. The earlier tradition was to have the altar inside the sanctum itself (as for instance recommended in *Tantra-samucchaya*), and not outside in the open, as the case now is. The altar

in this event would be monolithic and not consist of several mouldings.

Icons in India have been from very ancient times carved in stone, or wood, made in clay, or cast in metal. Sometimes precious stones and crystals are also used for carving small icons out of them. *Ajitāgama* lists gem, stone, metal, wood and clay as materials to be preferred in the order they are mentioned. Little icons are also carved out of conch-shell and elephant's tusk. Icons for permanent use and for installation in temples are usually made of stone, although the old practice was to have wooden icons in the sanctum. Icons for mobile purposes are cast in metal. Household icons are metallic (bronze, copper, silver and gold) or carved out of crystal or

gem. Icons for temporary use are made in clay or variant material.



There are manuals (like *Aparājita-pricchā*) which provide elaborate instructions for the purpose of carving. Different icons are to be made in different kinds of stone or wood. Stones from the rocky mountains are said to be most preferable, and when they are not available, stones from ground level

may be used. Stones are classified into male (*pum-śilā*, bright coloured; free from spiral grains and knots; which when struck sounds like a brass-gong; and which during excavation throws out splinters like sparks of fire), female (*strī-śilā*, eight coloured, having, streaks of grains, which, when struck, emit a hollow but pleasant sound), and 'neuter' (*napumsaka-śilā*, dull-coloured, hard

and not producing any musical sound when struck).

'Male' stones are employed for making major icons of gods and goddesses, while the pedestal thereof is carved out of 'female' stones. However, *Purushottama-samhitā* (5, 63) suggests that 'female' stones must be used for images of goddesses, while the pedestals must be carved out of 'male' stones. The 'neuter' stones are used for structures hidden under the ground (like *ratna-nyāsa*). Among the stones, the black-stone (*kṛshṇa-śilā*), finely grained granite, is generally recommended. Early Pallavas appear to have preferred sandstone for making *lingas* and icons. But the manuals insist on careful examination of stone before it is selected. Steatite



and marble are also employed, especially in the northern regions of the country.

The selection of wood for sculpting icons figures prominently in the early manuals, for wooden images were frequent in olden days. The most ancient images in the country are known to have been wooden; stone stepped in rather late in the history of Indian iconography. Several trees have been named as fit for icon carving : khadira, sandal, red sandal, aśoka, devadāru, bilva, śāla, kadamba, champaka, bakula, udumbara, arjuna and śālmālī are frequently mentioned.

The location and nature of trees are important considerations. Trees in the burial grounds, on tank-bunds, at road-crosses, and in the



close vicinity of huge ant-hills and ponds are to be avoided. Trees that have been worm-eaten, lightning-struck, and damaged by elephants are not regarded as fit. Trees that are barren, very old and worn out, with bark peeling off, are also unfit. Trees on which birds have built nests, and which provide shade for the cattle are to be left alone, and should not be cut down for icon-making. Trees that do not have a pleasant aspect or have fallen by themselves, are likewise unsuitable.

The piece of stone or the log of wood selected is treated in an elaborate manner in order to divest it of its inert nature and to infuse into it the power to contain the divine image.

An interesting procedure is given in *Pādma-samhitā* (11, 101-104, which also occurs in *Purushottama-tantra*, 6, 22, 27). Before the log of wood is cut off the tree, the priest-sculptor prays thus to the tree: "You have become inert and immobile owing to your past conduct. But I choose you for a meritorious condition, for carving out of you the image of Viṣṇu which will confer benefits on humanity. I shall not hurt you, my friend, but I shall release you from your present inert condition. By the

grace of God, you shall enjoy all the worship that is done to God."

Then he ties the consecrated thread round the tree, sets up a small sacrificial fire in front of the tree, and after oblations are offered into the fire, cuts down the tree with an axe that has also been duly worshipped. While cutting, he stands facing East and recites prescribed hymns. The same procedure applied to stone also.

When the piece of stone or log of wood has been cut, it is ceremoniously brought to the sacrificial enclosure (*yāga-śālā*) in a procession. A consecrated 'pot' (*pūrṇa-kumbha*) is then installed, and the stone or wood is treated to an elaborate ritual before it is given over to the sculptor.

The carving is done, preferably in the apartment of the temple meant to be the sanctum, with doors closed, during three, five, seven or nine days. If the apartment that is designated as sanctum is not available for this work, then a pavilion is specially set apart to the south or north of the temple, covered with a decorated *vitāna* from which cocoanuts and fly-whisks hang. The stone or wood is placed in the centre of this pavilion, and is worshipped with flowers, sandal-paste and other offerings. The sculptor commences his work with an initial ritual resembling *ankura-arpana* ('seed-sowing' ceremony).

Different methods for preparing the clay for making the icons are given. The usual method, however, is the following. Soft-clay,

red, white, black or yellow in colour, is collected from top of a hillock or from river-beds, and is thoroughly sieved. It is then kneaded well with water, cow's milk, ghee, curds, wheat-flour and *triphala*-powder. Sometimes, gingelly oil is also added. The mass is then kept away for a fortnight or month before it is taken up for icon-making. After the image is made, it is dried in the sun for a month, or baked in low fire. It is suggested that some gold or gems be placed inside the clay image while worship is done. The clay icon may also be painted over.

The clay image is classed among 'temporary' or 'occasional' icons, which are not suitable for installation in temples or for permanent worship. Such icons are installed (*āvāhana*) just prior to the

commencement of a ritual sequence, and is discharged' (*visarjana*) in water immediately after worship is over. Besides clay, sand, cow-dung, sandal-paste, rice-flour, jaggery or butter is also used for making such icons that are not supposed to last for more than a day.

While the main icon installed in the *Brahma*-position inside the sanctum is usually carved out of stone, there will be one or more metallic images to serve various ritualistic ends. The former is said to be 'fixed on jewels' (*ratna-nyāsa*), and is therefore immobile. The latter are not fixtures, and can be taken to the sopts of several rituals (*karmārchā*), such as bathing (*snapana*) procession (*utsava*), audience (*koluvu*), and food-distribution (*bali*).



Rāma - an old bronze image found at Nāgārjuna-Koṇḍa in Āndhra Pradesh : around 3rd Century A.D.

Three major metals are prescribed for the making of such icons : gold (pure, *jātarūpa* or alloy, *hāṭaka*), silver (pure, *rūpya*, or impure, *rajata*), and copper (pure, *tāmra* or mixed, *miśrita*). Although the first is said to be the best, the last is preferred frequently, and for obvious reasons. More usually,

however, bronze (*kāṁsya*) and brass (*arakūṭa* or *paittala*) are used for portable icons. In the South, icons made of a mixture of five metals (*pañcha-loha*) are common : copper, gold, silver, brass and white lead. Iron (*āyasa*), lead (*sīsaka*) and tin (*trapu*) are used for making images of wicked and terrific aspects, employed in magical rites.

The casting of bronze icons was perfected in India even during the days of Indus civilisation, as the splendid figure discovered at Harappa illustrates. We have an excellent casket-lid of the Kushāṇa period (second century) found at Shaj-ji-Dheri. The Gupta craftsmen appear to have perfected the casting technique, known as 'lost wax' or *cire perdue* (*madhūcchishṭa-vidhāna*), although Tamil-Nāḍu

became the centre of this art about the fifth century. A remarkable specimen of the Gupta style is the seven-foot Buddha icon, weighing a ton and cast in two layers in bronze and copper, found at Sultānganj. Nāgapattinam icons in the South date almost from the same period.

The original image is made in wax (bees's wax mixed with charcoal powder), and over this model a coat of soft clay is applied leaving an opening, and left to dry. When perfectly dry, the claycoating is heated so that the wax model within melts and comes out through the outlet, leaving the mould of the model. Into the opening, then, the molten bronze is poured. When, after sometime, the metal cools, the clay coating is broken open, and we have the image cast in solid bronze.



Siva as Natarāja

By a variance of the procedure, hollow-casting is also accomplished. This is common in the northern region, especially in Nepal and Tibet. The purpose of making the image hollow is to insert into it a magical formula inscribed on a scroll, a piece of scriptural writing, or a precious relic of the holy teacher so as to infuse into the image an

extraordinary power that otherwise it would not contain. The art-work that an icon is, becomes fit for worship only when it accommodates a supernatural energy.

The importance of this casting technique, detailed in texts like *Śilpa-ratna*, consists in each classical bronze icon in India being a unique piece. The wax is lost and the clay mould is destroyed. There is thus no way of mechanically duplicating the artist's handiwork. Indian bronze icons have become most valuable on this account. It would be impossible for the same craftsman to produce two identical images in metal; it would necessarily be different each time. But the workmanship is altogether traditional

and is so highly standardized that numerous icons fall into definite patterns, and look alike.

Craftsmanship involved in South Indian bronze icons has become world-renowned. The craft is highly skilled, and the art is superb. While the rules of iconometry are scrupulously followed, each bronze reveals an individual touch that is unmistakable in a master-piece. The craftsman here has freed himself from a natural and compelling impact of stone-sculpture, for it is the stone icons that provide models for the metallic ones. The bronze-worker feels freer to incorporate his turns of fancy within the stylized pattern, as he mainly works with wax while

modelling. Finishing the bronze icon is essentially a matter of the craftsman's skill and experience; the wax model, on the other hand, is in every case a work of art.

The icon-maker enjoys a measure of freedom within the framework of canonical prescriptions. It is this utilization of freedom that stamps the icon with an individuality that is unique. The iconometric details have of course the beauty of the figure in view; but the beauty they envisage is rigid and formal. The texts insist that the image-maker must do the work as it pleases him, and as his fancy takes him (*yathā ruchi*). And the artist has to take into consideration the modes of dress and decoration

that are prevalent at the place and at the time. So we read in *Brhatsamhitā*:

देशानुरूपभूषणवेशालङ्कारमूर्तिभिः

कार्या प्रतिमा ॥

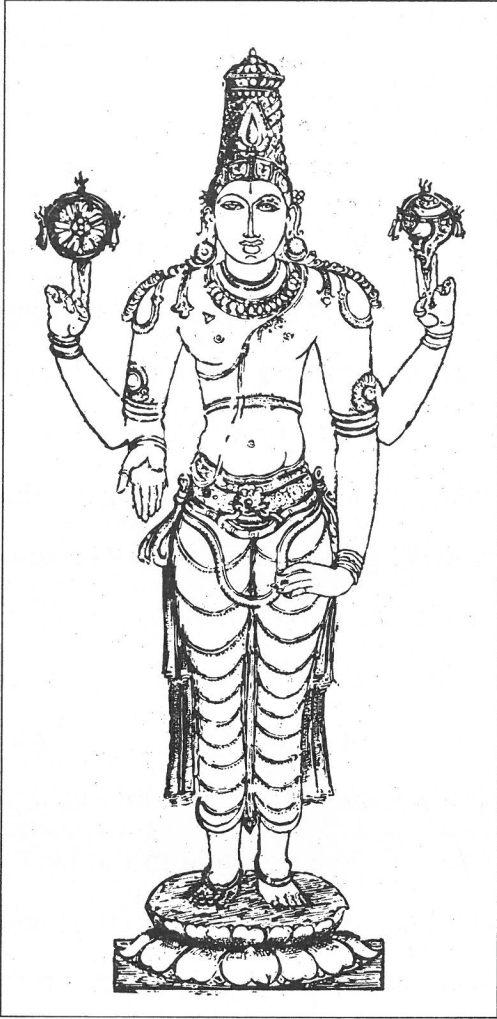
This provision gives the sculptor freedom for expression, and plasticity in the iconic forms stylized in canons.

CHAPTER IX

THE VALUE OF ICONS

The symbolism of the Indian icon extends to its postural and decorative details. Icons are classified according to the classical *guṇa* they signify or embody. It is well-known that the theory of three *guṇas*, 'sattva' (goodness, brightness, purity, wisdom), 'rajas' (activity, energy, emotion), and 'tamas' (wickedness, dullness, sloth, resistance) is an abiding contribution of the Sāṅkhya school to Indian thought. The entire universe (and every individual) is constituted of different combinations of these three *gunas*, with one of them predominant in an object, or on an occasion.

Images that are seated having an aspect of tranquillity, and showing the *mudrās* (hand-gestures) of boon-giving (*varada*) or offering protection (*abhaya*) are said to belong to the *sāttvika*-group. Images that stand, or ride on a vehicle (*vāhana*), show the *mudrās* of valour or challenge, and bear in hands weapons answer to the *rājasa* description. Images that ride on a vehicle, hold in the hands terrible weapons of warfare, and have an aspect of cruelty belong to the *tāmasa* group. The first group is generally benign and happy (*saumya*), while the last is fierce and destructive (*ugra or samhāra*).



Śrīnivāsa; a sculptor's sketch according to the standard tāla-māna

Images of Viṣṇu as Para-Vāsudeva, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, Śiva

as Sadāśiva, Somāskanda and Dakṣiṇā-mūrti, Gaṇeśa, Aiyappa (Śāsta), Lakṣmī, Rājarājeśvarī and Sarasvatī are illustrations of the *Sāttvika* type. *Maya-śāstra*, an iconographic manual, describes this type as characterized by eyes looking straight and serene, and by a peaceful aspect (“samadrishtis tu śānta cha”); it brings quiet happiness to the devotee and helps in the dawning of wisdom in him.

Images of Viṣṇu in the *sthānaka* (standing) posture like Trivikrama, Rāja-gopāla, Śrīnivāsa, Janārdana and Keśava; Śiva as Bhikṣhātana, Naṭarāja, Umālingana and Viṣahara; composite images like Hari-Hara and Ardha-Nārī, images of Devī in the *sthānaka* posture; Gaṇeśa in the *dance stance*,

Rāma with Śītā are illustrations of the *rājasa* type.

Vishṇu as Narasimha, Kṛṣṇa as Kāliya-damana, Durgā riding on the lion while killing the demon Mahisha, Skanda riding of the peacock and leading the army of gods against the demons, and Vīrabhadra destroying Daksha's sacrifice belong to the *tāmasa* type.

This typology should not be taken to mean that some gods by themselves are 'good' and others 'bad'. A value-judgment of this sort is not indicated. The *sāttvika* icon is worshipped for the final liberation of the devotee from phenomenal involvement. The *rājasa*, however, is worshipped for protection and prosperity, and for the fulfilment of normal desires. The *tāmasa* images

on the other hand, are invoked in times of stress, danger and challenge.



*Śrīnivāsa in Chera style of the 9th century
now in the Trivandrum Museum*

Any god may assume any of these aspects. Vishṇu as Yogā-narasimha is really benign, although his countenance is fierce. Śiva as Dakṣiṇā-murthy is actually destructive (-he stamps on the

apasmāra-purusha with his right foot-), although the general aspect is calm and meditative. Likewise Naṭarāja. Durgā riding on the lion and killing Mahisha has a calm and pleasant expression on her face. The warrior Rāma may stand in a quiet posture, like the warrior Skanda standing as an innocent boy (Kumāra or Bāla-subrahmaṇya).

Among the Viṣṇu images, it is usual to notice four varieties (according to *Marīchi-saṃhitā*) : *yoga* (meditative), *bhoga* (pleasant), *vīra* (valourous) and *ābhichārika* (wicked). The bodily posture, and weapons in the hands (śaṅkha and Chakra) are the same in all varieties; even facial expression may be the same. But the image is *yoga* when it is meant for ascetics seeking final



beatitude, *bhoga* when it is meant to be worshipped by common folk for the obtainment of protection and prosperity, *vīra* when worshipped by warriors for the conquest of enemies, and *ābhichārika* when magicians and sorcerers resort to it in the course of their professional pursuits. However, the manuals suggest that the *yoga* type of Viṣṇu images is to be installed on banks of rivers and in solitary spots; the *bhoga* type in the midst of human



The Buddha in dhyāna

settlement; the *vīra* type outside the township; and the *ābhichārika* on hill-tops, in forts and in the forest fastness.

According to *Archanā-prakāśa*, however, *yoga*, *bhoga* and *vīra* are three forms of energy (*śakti*) in any icon. The first refers to the pedestal (*pīṭha* or ritualistic installation of the icon), the second to the peculiar

power (*śakti*) that is contained in the image properly consecrated, and the third to the physical or material aspect of the image (*bāhyālaya*). The devotee is at first in contact with the exterior form of the icon, then he becomes aware of the import of the iconic form, and finally meditates on the source of the iconic projection. The iconic form thus is a crutch for the devotee to move ahead in the path of spiritual fulfilment.

The images of the Buddha and Jina (a *tīrthankara*) are excellent illustrations of icons providing adorable models for man's spiritual aspirations. We should remember that it was the Buddha image that provided enormous encouragement to Indian iconography. In its early

phase of development, Buddhist iconography was averse to delineating the supremely enlightened one as a mere human being; he was represented by a *bodhi*-tree, a royal insignia like the wheel or umbrella, a pair of sacred foot-imprints, or a vacant diamond-throne (*vajrāsana*), as illustrated by the early sculptured panels of Sāñchī, Amarāvātī and Nālandā. It was the Gāndhāra style that broke this resistance, and commenced representing the Buddha like a valorous, handsome young prince or like a miserable ascetic, emaciated and moribund. The Mathurā style corrected this trend, and emphasized the spirit of composure and wisdom that the Buddha image symbolized.

An image of great charm and significance is that of

Prajñāpāramitā, the goddess of transcendental wisdom, within the Mahāyāna framework. The image stylized with several variants owes its origin to the deification of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature around the first century after Christ. The deity became very popular around 300 A.D. and its hold on the Buddhist masses in India continued till about the eleventh century. A manual of rituals (of Tāntrik origin), *Sādhana-mālā*, provides not only a description of this image but an account of its symbolism. She represents the highest knowledge that enlightens and liberates.

Seated on the adamant seat (*vajrāsana*), she is in a meditative posture, holding the *Prajñāpāramitā* text and rosary in her hands, and assuming a teaching (or wheel-

turning) gesture. She is the Supreme Female; and the feminine (or generative) aspect of wisdom is symbolized by the lotus, which motif is prominently involved in her icon. The graphic representation of this deity is more popular (especially in manuscripts and on banners) than the sculptured. But the magnificent stone icon from Jāvā, sculptured about the thirteenth century and now in the Leiden Museum, is well-known.

Perhaps there was an independent trend among the Mathurā and Gupta sculptors that crystallized the representation of the twenty-four *tīrthankara* icons, with their human individuality lost in the general portrayal of the *kāyotsarga* or *pratimā-yoga* posture but the uniqueness of a *tīrthankara* being

symbolized by an emblem. The idea of the Jina, serene and untainted by worldly ills or cares, erect and nude, was also an ideal. The model was followed not only for the *tīrthankaras* but also for lesser saints like Bāhubali and Bharata. The Śravaṇa-beḷgoḷa colossus of Bhāubali (called here Gommaṭa), measuring 58 feet in height, is a well-known example of the *kevalī*-ideal translated into a monolith. The contrasting imagery of the *tīrthankara* as an emancipated saint and as a prince steeped in worldly riches (*Jīvanta-svāmi*) is a favourite theme in Jaina iconography.

The *tīrthankaras* are further distinguished by characteristic male and female guardian-angels (*Yakshas* and *Yakshiṇīs*), who also figure prominently in iconography. Many divinities of the folk religion survive

in the Jaina framework, like Brahmā riding on the horse, Bhairavi the terrible goddess, and Śruta-devatā the scripture incarnated. Each of these icons represents an idea relevant to the Jaina discipline; the icon is more of a symbol than a shape. The Tāntrik prescription of *Yantra* is also involved in the Jaina approach to the worship of these divinities.



Pārśvanātha-tīrthankara



Among the Śiva images, the most interesting and also the most bristling with symbolism is the dancer Naṭarāja (Tāṇḍaveśvara), whose home is Chidambaram in Tamiḻ Nāḍu. This aspect of Śiva is said to have been incarnated among the Dīkshitar Brahmins of Tillai 3000, the original capital of which was Tiruvenkāḍa (called (*Ādi-Tillai*)). The Choḷa monarch Parāntaka I

(907-955 A.D.) was a great devotee of this aspect of Śiva, and he built 'the sky-hall' (*dabhra sabhā*), covered with a roof of gold. It is this hall, in which Śiva is supposed to have danced, that came to be called *Pon-ambalam* or Chidambaram. The divine dancer whose Tamil name is Āḍavallān, became the patron-god of the Chōla Kings, and under their patronage numerous metallic icons of Naṭarāja were made and cast in Tamil-Nāḍu. The most celebrated among such images are the ones of Tiruvālangāḍu, Kūram and Nallūr. All these belong to the latter half of the ninth century.

The significance of the Chidambaram shrine of Naṭarāja is the representation of the 108 dance-modes (*karaṇas*) stylized in Bharata's



Nāṭya-śāstra with descriptive labels on two of the inner sides of the gateway of *gopurams* (East and West). We find similar plastic representations on one of the tiers of the sanctum of the Rājarāja Temple at Tañjavūr and on the eastern *gopuram* of Śārṅgapāṇi temple at Kumbhakoṇam. The dance

is said to symbolize the five acts of God (*pañchakṛtya*): creation, preservation, destruction, embodiment and release.

Almost every Śiva temple in the Tamil country has a separate sanctuary for Naṭarāja called a Sabhā. Important among them are Rajata-Sabhā (Silver Hall) at Madhurai, where the dancer-Śiva has lifted the other foot, as desired by the King Varaguṇa-pāṇḍya; Chitra-Sabhā in Tiruk-kuṭrālam, Gaurī-tāṇḍava-sabhā at Tirupputtūr, Agni-sabhā in Tirunelveli, Ratna-sabhā in Tirvālangāḍu (where the stance is ūrdhva-tāṇḍava), Mukti-sabhā in Gañjanūr and Perambalam in Kuṇḍandaik-kīlkoṭṭai. Associated sometimes with such sabhās are Sangīta-sabhās, halls with musical pillars, as in Madhurai on the



processional street (Uttara-ādi-vīdi) where there are five musical pillars, each of them having twenty-two slim pillarets, which produce musical notes when struck, or in Tirupputtur where the Naṭarāja-sabhā has associated with it five musical pillars with sculptures which produce subtle sounds when tapped.

Inspired by the Nāṭarāja model, there are images of other gods also in dance postures. There is an unusual sculpture of dancing Narasimha on a pillar in the great temple on the Tirumalai hills. Kṛṣṇa is often represented as dancing on the hood of the dragon Kāliya or dancing with a ball of butter in hand. There are old sculptures of dancing Gaṇeśa also called 'Wattuvar pillaiyār', many Śiva temples have such images during the Chola period.

Many of the hand and finger gestures (*mudrās*), and bodily postures and bends (*bhangis*), employed in classical dance modes, are also involved in iconographic delineation, with slight variations. This renders the icons full of grace and charm. And during the

ascendancy of the Chola style, the gestures and bends became all too prominent, especially in metallic icons.

The characteristic weapons, like the discus, conch and mace for Viṣṇu; trident, kettle-drum, and fire for Śiva; noose and goad for Gaṇeśa; bow and arrow for Rāma; skull-mace (*khaṭvāṅga*) and lone spear (*śūla*) for Durgā; broad sword and shield of Vīrabhadra, and so on together with the manner in which they are held, got stylized during the Chola period of Indian iconography. The weapons have their own specific symbolisms, which contribute to the general symbolism of the entire icon. Some of the symbols have a Vedic background (wheel, fire, lotus, spear, bow etc.); and some can be traced back to the

Tāntric prescriptions : *khaṭvāṅga*, skull, bell, *bījapūra*, etc.); and some to the Purāṇic legends (antelope, conch, mace, thunderbolt, broadsword etc).

Symbols assist in contemplation. An icon is



worshipped in order that it can serve as an effective foundation for sustained attention on the divine nature and power-

अलम्बनस्य प्राधान्येन ध्यानं प्रतीकोपास्तेः ।

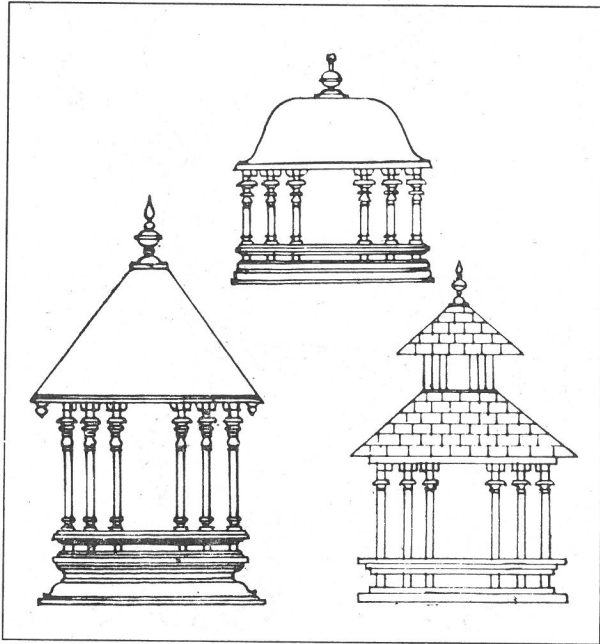
The devotee seeks to rise from the details that symbolize to the subject that is symbolized. The artistic quality in the icon facilitates the holding of attention there, and the stylized details (like posture, gestures and weapons) quicken the mental processes of ready superimposition and abstraction. The foundation (*adhishṭhāna*) viz., the icon, is only initially important; what is of relevance throughout, however, is the figure that is sought to be abstracted from this foundation (*āropya*), viz., the nature of Godhead. The expression *prati-mā* or *pratīka* for the icon signifies that

being different from Godhead (being a material thing, made by man) it indicates and brings about the experience of Godhead-

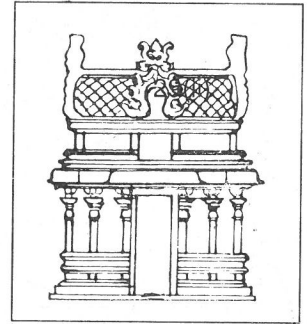
तद्भिन्नत्वे सति तद्धोधकत्वं प्रतीकत्वम् ।

As a symbol, an icon need not be in human form. By a conventional association, any natural object could

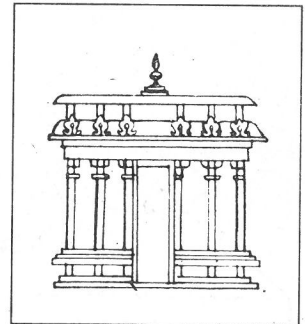
function like an aniconic icon : rounded ammonites with spirals cut naturally in the holes (*Śālagrāma*) stand for Viṣṇu, white quartz for Śiva, metallic stone for Devī, crystal for Sun, and red stone for Gaṇeśa.



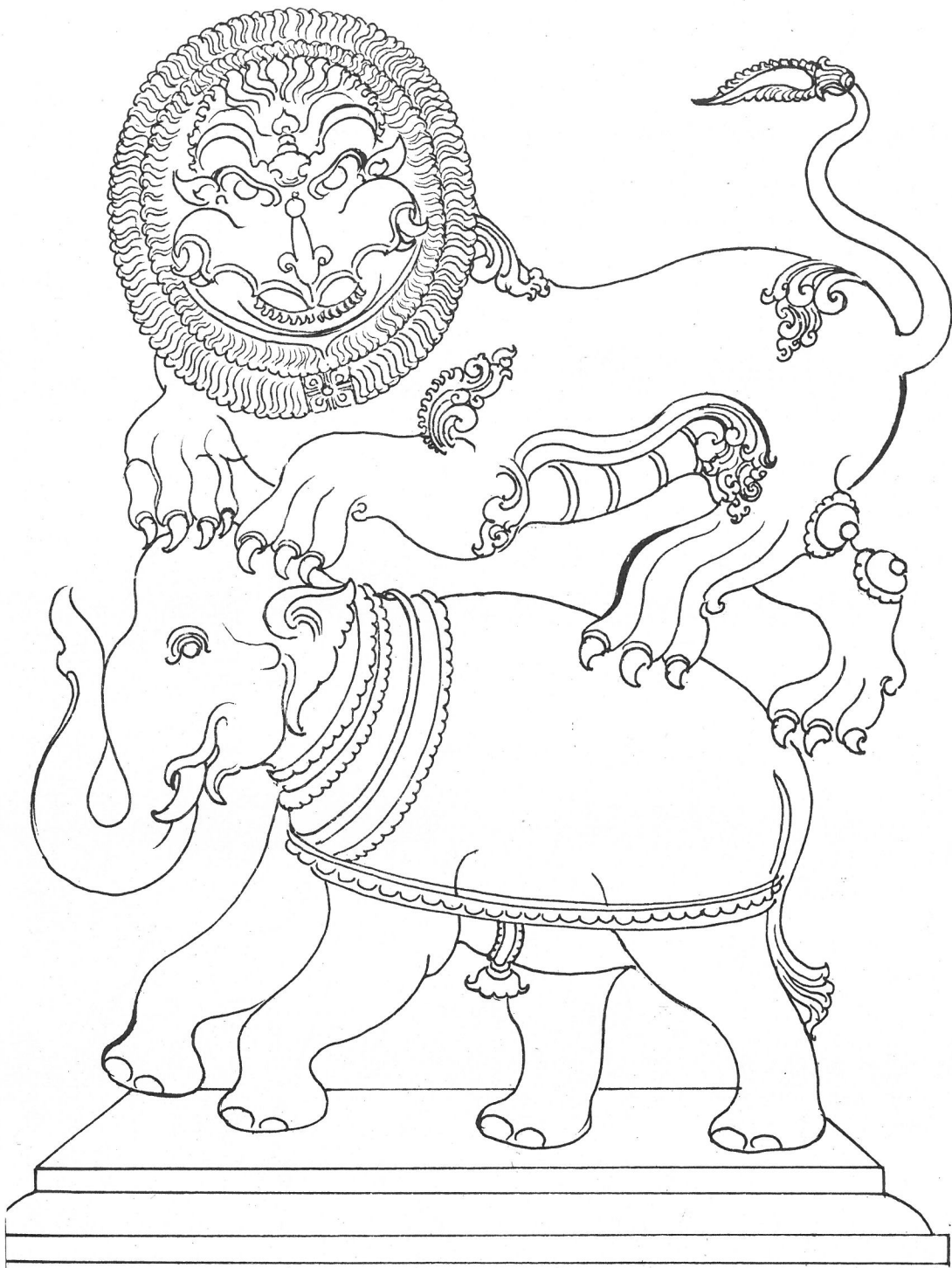
Lupā type of Temple
Chhatrākāra-lupā



Śālākāra-lupā



Maṇṭāpākāra-lupā



CHAPTER X

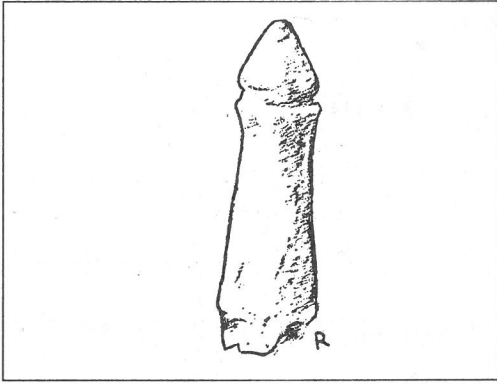
INDIAN ICONOGRAPHY

Śiva is chiefly worshipped in the aniconic *linga*, although his iconic representations (*mūrti*) are popular, especially in South India. It is not accidental that the form of the *linga* resembles the phallus, and the word itself means 'gender', or more specifically the male generative organ. However, this detail does not dominate over the Indian imagination with regard to Śiva-*linga*.

The expression 'linga' also means, and in a more significant manner, "sign", "symbol", index : it is an image of the unmanifest but omnipresent divine principle. It is to be noted that lingas (called *bāṇa-linga*) worshipped in homes usually

take the form of unusual pebbles picked up from some sacred river (like Narmadā), and they do not in any way remind one of the phallus. Nor do the worship rituals, or the texts recited during them, contain even a remote reference to the cult of the phallus. It is a fact, however, that many *purāṇic* legends bring in sex to explain the origin of Śiva-*linga*. The folk fancy that is illustrated here has not survived in the sophisticated take-over.

A suspiciously phallic representation has been recovered from the site of the Indus Valley civilization, and it is identified as a *linga*. We cannot be sure of this



Linga from Indus culture

identification, but the sculptured lingam found at Guḍimallam (Paraśu-rāmeśvara temple) in Āndhra Pradesh is unmistakably phallic in delineation. The date of this curious image carved out of a foot-thick hard stone and polished, has been given as second or first century before Christ (according to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy). The art involved in it is decidedly prior to the Kushāṇa stylization. On the front part of the shaft has been carved in bold relief a male deity with a battle-axe, a water-vessel and a ram

in his two hands, standing on a crouching dwarf. The five-foot tall icon is indeed remarkably realistic. It may be the earliest iconic representation of Śiva within the aniconic framework of a *linga*; there is neither the characteristic pedestal (*pīṭha*) nor the typical *arghya* of later lingas.

Likewise an early Śiva image (now in the Lucknow Museum) found at Bhiṭā is a composite one, aniconic as well as iconic. This image, may be said to belong to the *mukha-linga* variety, containing a human face in the linga framework. Here, not only the head but the deity's bust also is sculpted in relief, one of the hands in the abhaya gesture and the other holding a water vessel. The image has been inscribed in Brāhmī characters which suggest

an early date (about the first century before Christ). The art employed in the icon has been described as a specimen of the Śuṅga style which matured in Magadha around the same period.

The Kushāṇa coins (gold and copper) of the first and second centuries A.D. portray Śiva in a decidedly anthropomorphic manner. The early Ujjain coins have only the two-armed Śiva (like the Guḍimallam icon), holding a club in one hand and a water-vessel in the other; some coins make him hold a trident or a stick. Śiva is found also to be represented in these coins in a theriomorphic manner by a bull.

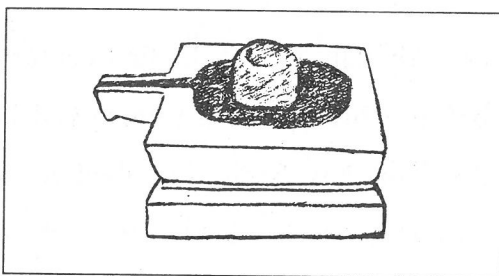
Patañjali (third century B.C.) is acquainted with Śiva icons, and not with the aniconic *liṅga*. Going

back, we do not come across any reference to *liṅga* worship in the Vedic literature, although Śiva (Rudra) was a recognized divinity even in *Rgveda*. And we have the well-known and so-called Paśupati-seal in the remains of the Indus Valley Civilization. It may indeed be a representation of Śiva.

From the available evidences, the conclusion suggested is that till about the first century A.D., Śiva was worshipped only in the anthropomorphic and iconic form. The employment of *liṅga* as his symbol may have come into vogue in the subsequent period.

Śiva is said to have 'manifest' (*vyakta*) or iconic, 'unmanifest' (*avyakta*) or abstract, and 'both manifest and unmanifest' or aniconic

(*vyaktāvyakta*) forms. The *linga* illustrates the third form : it is manifest and is symbolic of divine presence, but devoid of details that could be regarded as human. However, the *linga* is further classified into *nishkala* (having no parts) and *sakala* (having identifiable parts). The former variety of *linga* is a mere monolithic shaft, from one inch to as much as 144 inches in height. The second variety consists of parts such as the *linga* proper (shaft or protuberance), a flat container (*yoni* or *gaurīpaṭṭa*), a pedestal (*pīṭha*), and sometimes a round ball on top of the *linga* (known as *vajra*). The scriptural prescription is that the whole piece should be monolithic, and should have no joints except for the *vajra*.



A reference in the *Mahābhārata* (Sauptika-parvan, 17,13-14) gives a clue to the source of the latter variety. Śiva appeared in answer to the prayer of Aśvatthāma as a golden altar (*vedī*) with fire emanating from it. The *linga*-shaft stands for the fire element, and the altar is the earth element (*mṛṇmayam sthaṇḍilam*, as suggested in the episode of the hunter and Arjuna in the ‘*Vanaparvan*’ section of the epic). An iconographic and Tāntrik text, *Ajitāgama*, describes *linga* as a “pillar of light” (*jyothi-stambha*), and explains it as the fire in which all beings disappear

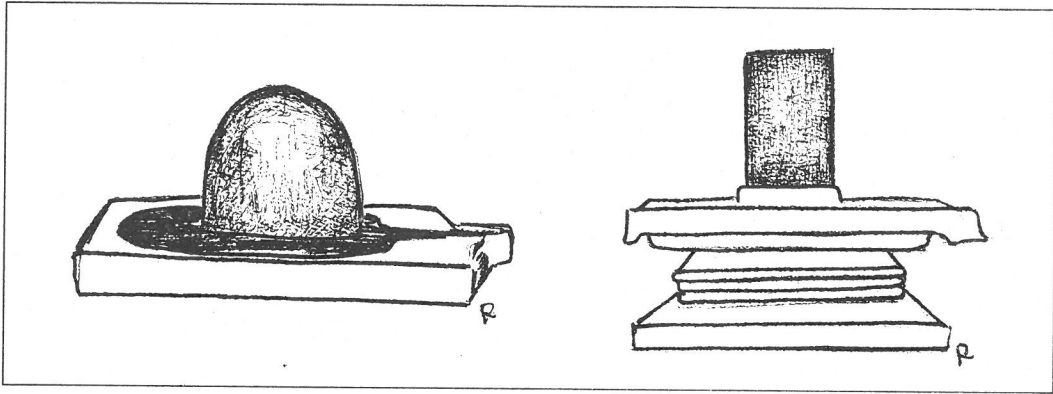
(*lī*) and from which all beings burst forth as sparks from fire (*ga*).

The *līṅga* has three distinct parts. The top one-third of the shaft is visible, and this is the *līṅga* proper that is worshipped. It is called the Śiva-aspect (*Rudra-bhāga* or *Pūjā-bhāga*). The middle one-third of the shaft is unseen, hidden in the pedestal. While the above is looked upon as 'male', this embedded detail is considered the 'female', although it is called the Viṣṇu-aspect (*Viṣṇu-bhāga*). The bottom one-third goes into the structure known as *Nandyāvarta*, accommodated inside the earth. This is the Brahma-aspect, regarded as 'neuter'. Iconographical prescription recommends the top portion to be in the round (cylindrical), the middle

eight-sided, and the bottom squarish (*Ajītāgama*).

There are differential iconometric details which are prescribed for the three parts, thus resulting in several varieties of the *līṅga*. When the three parts are equal (the proportion being 1-1-1), the *līṅga* is designated 'sarvato-bhadra'. When the Śiva and Viṣṇu-parts, themselves being equal, exceed the Brahmā-part, it is 'Svastika' (4-4-3). Texts like *Aparājitapṛcchā* mention thirty-three kinds of *līṅgas*, both 'mobile' (*chala*) and 'immobile' (*achala*), from 24 inches in height to 216 inches.

Making a *līṅga* under a cubit is not recommended. The lowest kinds of *līṅgas* are between a cubit and three cubits; the intermediary



ones range between four and six cubits, while the best ones are between seven and nine. Metallic lingas are of eight kinds, and when between three inches and sixteen they are regarded as 'mobile', and when this limit is exceeded, the *linga* must be installed in a place permanently.

Temporary *lingas* may be made out of sand, rice-grains, cooked rice, rice-flour, clay, cow-dung, sandal-paste, jaggory, butter, tender sprouts or flowers. Twelve varieties of such *lingas* are enumerated, and no

iconometric regulation is involved in them. They are to be dissolved in water as soon as the worship is over.

Permanent *lingas* made in stone are of four types, according to the variety of stone (coloured white, dark red or yellow). The minimum height prescribed for a stone *linga* is 24 inches, and the maximum 216 (according to *Aparājita-prcchā*).

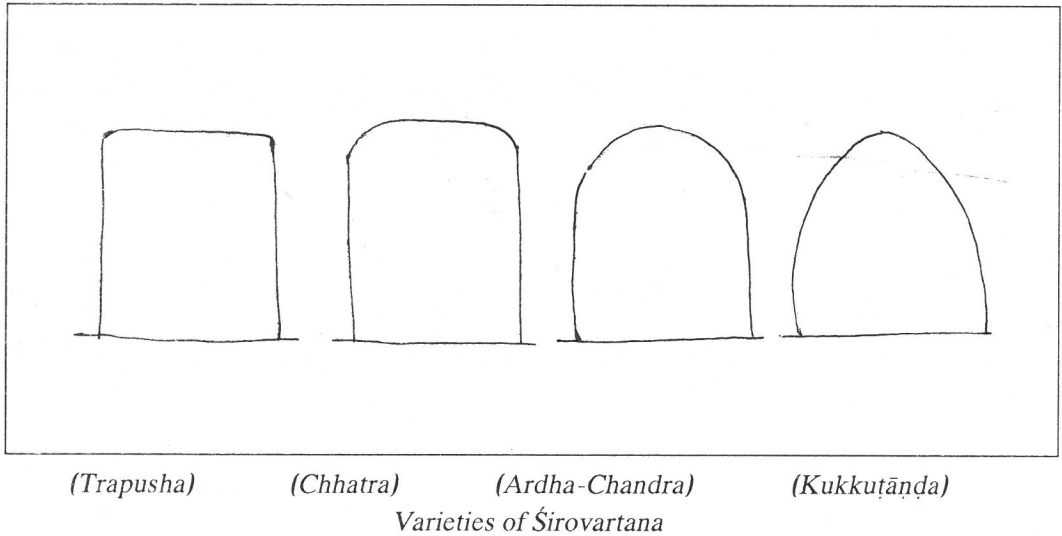
Wooden *lingas* are likewise distinguished by the type of wood used, and they are of eight kinds.

There is a prohibition against making an wooden linga under sixteen inches in height.

While these are man-made *lingas*, the natural *lingas* are said to be obtained in sacred spots like Śrī-śaila, Amara-kaṇṭaka and Narmadā river-bed. These are called 'bāṇa-lingas', and the prescriptions of form and size do not apply to them.

The part of the linga that is worshipped is the visible shaft, which

in fact is called the *linga*. The top of this portion is never flat but rounded off. But there are four main types of rounding off (*śirovartana*) in the manner of an egg of the hen (*kukkuṭāṇḍa*), a gourd (*trapusha*), an umbrella (*chhatra*), or half-moon (*ardhachandra*). There is a fifth kind which resembles a water-bubble (*budbuda*). The iconometric proportion of these types in terms of the three parts of the linga (Rudra, Viṣṇu and Brahma) are : 9-8-7 in

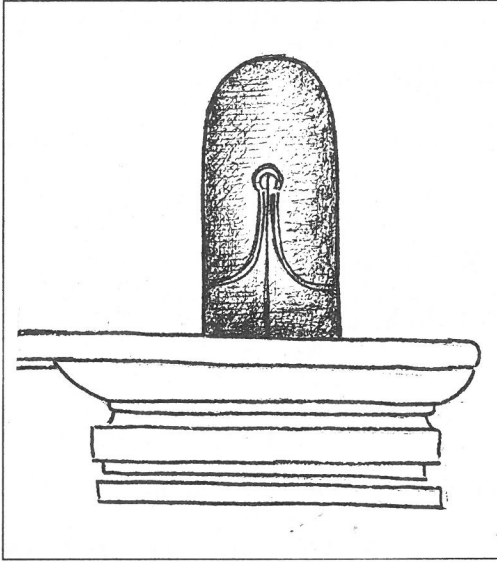


the 'egg' type; $8\frac{1}{2}$ -8- $7\frac{3}{4}$ in the 'gourd' type; 8-8-8 in the 'umbrella' type; and $7\frac{1}{2}$ -8- $8\frac{1}{2}$ in the 'half-moon' type.

On the Śiva portion of the *linga* (the visible shaft) may be carved and flattened with vertical strips (*dhārās*), usually, five, seven or nine. The strips may be as many as 64. Or there may be the carving in relief of the human face on the *linga*, in which case the *linga* is called 'mukha-linga'. This type of *linga* which is iconic-aniconic is an ancient one. The earlier practice was to have just one face, but later three, four, and even five faces became common. Two faces are never carved, except in the *linga* meant to be used in black magic (*Īśāna-śiva-gurudeva-paddhati*, 2,40). It is a rule

that it is only the *linga* where the Śiva's part is in excess of the other two that the faces could be carved. The texts prescribe that the Śiva's part of the *linga* is to be divided into three equal parts, and the face should cover one and a half of these parts.

When the face is not sculpted on the *linga*, there may be decorative designs such as "the elephant's eyes", "cow's ear", trident, circle, bud, outline of the conch or umbrella, or paddy-grain. This marking is known as 'lakṣaṇoddhāra' or 'brahma-sūtra'. The rule is that the Śiva-part of the *linga* be divided into three parts, only the lower two parts being used for such marking.



We have mentioned earlier that despite the wide employment of the aniconic linga for worship of Śiva, his iconic representations are popular. Texts mention several of these stylized representations : 16 according to *Kāśyapa-śilpa* and 18 according to *Śilpa-ratna*. And these have been grouped into two main divisions: ‘benevolent’ (*anugraha*) and ‘malevolent’ (*samhāra*). The former is distinguished by the gentle

and benign aspect and is represented as conferring boons on devotees, while the latter is fierce and found in the act of killing or subduing the wicked.

Being seated in an easy posture (*sukhāsana*), donning the moon on his matted locks (*Chandra-śekhara*), riding his bull (*Vṛshavāhana*), accommodating Gangā on his head (*Gangādhara*), teaching the great sages (*Dakṣiṇā-mūrti*), bestowing a boon on his attendant *Chandeśa* or on Arjuna (*Vara-pradāna*), and emanating with an iconic form from the aniconic linga (*Lingodbhava*) are among the situations that inspire the ‘benevolent’ icons. Illustrations of the other division are subduing death (*Kālāri*), tearing down the demon in elephant’s form (*Gajāsurasamhāra*), and fighting with Tripura (*Tripurāri*).



Interesting among the iconic representations of Śiva are Naṭarāja, Ardha-nāri (half male and half female), Hari-Hara (composite Viṣṇu-Śiva), Kalyāṇa-sundara (while wedding Pārvati) and Bhikṣhātana (on his begging round). Every one of these iconic representations has a Purāṇic legend

in its background. South Indian temples belonging to the Chola period contain numerous metallic icons of excellent workmanship illustrating the above situations in which Śiva is glorified.

Viṣṇu is a divinity of Vedic antiquity. The prevalence of the Bhāgavata cult during the centuries prior to the birth of Christ popularized his worship all over the country. Pāṇini and Patañjali (several centuries before Christ) were acquainted with the iconic worship of Vāsudeva and Sankarṣhaṇa (later Balarāma and in a variant form of Subrahmanya, the Sanke-deity). The heroes of the Vṛshṇī clan were being worshipped in temples (*vāṭikas*) and in the shape of icons (*pratimā*).



Kalyāna-sundara

The iconic form appears to have been crystallized as early as the first century before Christ, for there is an inscribed sculpture of the ‘four-armed (chaturbhujī) Bhagavān” of the date, found in the Burhikhar village in Bilāspur (Madhya-Pradesh). The image



*Madhukēśhvara at Banavāsi -
processional image*

carries discus and mace in its two extra hands. Curiously, however, the normal hands assume the *añjali* (supplication) posture, suggesting that the icon may be that of an attendant of Viṣṇu. It is usual for the attendant of a deity to be distinguished by the emblems and weapons of the deity itself. The worship of Viṣṇu seems to have been popular with the Hellenistic satraps and the early Gupta kings.

The iconography of Kṛṣṇa as a variant of Viṣṇu also dates back to a distant past. Kṛṣṇa's relation with Indra (Vedic hero) has been mentioned even in *R̥gveda* (8, 96, 13-5). *Ghaṭa-jātaka* knows him as a prince of Mathurā. Pāṇini suggests his association with the Pāṇḍava hero Arjuna. Patañjali refers to him as 'revered'. Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* (14,3) recommends the worship of Kṛṣṇa before collecting medicinal herbs.

Harivaṁśa makes the tribal goddess Ekānamśā (a prototype of the later Devi image) a sister to Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. The worship of the three (Ekānamśā as Subhadrā) has survived to this day in the famous Jagannātha temple at Puri (Orissa). The belief that all three of

these deities, especially Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva, are human incarnations of Viṣṇu had gained ground even in the centuries prior to the Christian era.

Apart from the inscrutable and unmanifest divine presence, there were abstract emanations from that source (*vyūha*) responsible for the evolution of the entire cosmos, as well as concrete incarnations (*avatāra*) in human and animal-human forms. The Vedic literature is acquainted with the animal incarnations of Prajāpati, which were now projected on Viṣṇu.

Rūpamaṇḍana enumerates as many as 24 images of Viṣṇu, of which man-boar (*nara-varāha*) is one; all the others are completely human or celestial. *Haya-śīrsha-*

saṃhitā, however, speaks of the 'man-fish' (*nṛi-matsya*), 'man-tortoise' (*nṛi-kūrma*) and 'man-lion' (*nṛi-simha*) forms in addition to the emanations of Viṣṇu.

The ten popular incarnations (*avatāras*) frequently represented in icons presuppose specific needs of devotees, and among them Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Paraśurāma, Vāmana and Buddha (or Balarāma) are entirely human; Matsya (Fish), Kūrma (Tortoise), Varāha (Boar) and Simha (Lion) are animal forms; and Kalki is the incarnation in future, appearing either as the hero riding on the horse or as the horse itself.

Besides these ten, Viṣṇu has other well-known iconic representations, such as Haya-grīva (Horse-headed), Dhanvantari (The



First Physician), Dattātreyā (composite sage, incorporating Brahmā, Vishṇu and Śiva) and Vyāsa (the sage who compiled the Veda). *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* lists twenty-two iconic forms of Vishṇu, while *Agni-purāṇa* twenty-four. And some of them have several variations, like Narasimha having as many as seventy-four (according to *Vihagendra-samhitā*, 4, 7), Varāha five, and Kṛṣṇa eight.

Narasimha is an interesting icon the occasion for this incarnation was to protect the young devotee Prahlāda, and to kill his wicked father Hiranya-kaśipu. The main aspect is therefore fierce, but there are relatively milder forms, as when he is with his consort Lakshmi (Bhoga-) or while in the meditative posture (Yoga-). There are fine icons in the South representing him as seated, standing (*sthānaka*), dancing (*nṛtya*), bursting forth from the pillar



(*sthāṇu-*), ferocious and flaming (*jvālā*), tearing open the breast of the demon (*ugra*), benign (*varada*), alone (*kevala*); and having two, eight, ten or sixteen arms. There is a curious image of five-headed Narasimha, described in *Īśvara-samhitā* (4, 76), and a composite figure of Varāha-Narasimha (*Parāśara-samhitā*, 30, 21).

The iconic *yantra* of Viṣṇu's discus, Sudarśana, will usually have



on its back an image in relief of eight or sixteen - armed Narasimha; known as Sudarśana-Narasimha. Narasimha is here regarded as located in the heart of Sudarśana (*Pādma-samhitā*, 31, 257).

Narasimha, the incarnation of Viṣṇu, is said to have continued to be fierce, even after the demon was killed; and the gods trembled for their safety. Then Śiva is supposed to have assumed the form of the mythical animal, more ferocious than the lion, 'Śarabha' to frighten Narasimha to sanity. We have icons of Śarabheśvara in the South. The story continues that Narasimha, instead of getting pacified, assumed a still more terrible form, a mythical bird-animal, 'Gaṇḍa-bheruṇḍa'. However, iconic illustrations of these

two forms are rather rare. Narasimha as Gaṇḍa-bheruṇḍa is the rarer of the two, but we have a drawing of it from the Mysore Court, done over a hundred years ago.

It is usual for the Viṣṇu icons to be associated with Lakṣmī or her incarnation (as Śītā with Rāma, and Rukmiṇī with Kṛṣṇa). Independent representation of Lakṣmī (Śrī or Sirimā-devatā) who is a Vedic goddess, can be found in the relief-sculptures of Bārhut and Sāñchī stupas. Regarded as one of the aspects of Mother-goddess, she is the presiding deity over wealth, agricultural plenty, and prosperity; she is associated with beauty and lotus. There are eight iconic representations of Lakṣmī with many arms, familiarly known as

ashṭa-lakṣmī, which are independent of Viṣṇu.

‘Mahā-lakṣmī’, in particular, has Tāntrik involvements, and is closely related to Durgā. As the consort of Viṣṇu, she is usually represented as a two-armed goddess seated by his side or on his lap (as for instance in the Lakṣmī-Narasimha or Lakṣmī-Hayagrīva icons). She is also symbolized by a triangular mole-mark (Śrī-vatsa) on the right chest of Viṣṇu when he is shown alone.

It may be recalled that in the Śiva-linga, the middle ‘Female’ part (called yoni or Gaurī-paṭṭa, which receives the water poured over the linga in the ceremonial bath given to it) is known in texts as Viṣṇu’s

part. We have other references that indicate the feminine role of Vishṇu (as in the story of Mohinī). Iconographically, the most usual representation of Durgā with the discus and conch, which are typical emblems of Vishṇu suggests the close association of Durgā with Vishṇu. Purāṇic legends make her Vishṇu's sister; Kṛṣṇa's association with the tribal goddess Ekānamśā (Bhadrā or Subhadrā) has already been mentioned. When Devī (Bhagavatī) is worshipped, the thought that she is Śiva's spouse is vague and irrelevant. She is either a divinity in her own right or is regarded as 'Vaishṇavī-śakti', the energetic aspect of Vishṇu.

Polytheism is the characteristic feature of Hinduism. But no Hindu

seriously believes in a multiplicity of Gods. He is aware that each of the many gods that he worships is merely an aspect of the One God, who is also the God of other religions. Sectarian strife is thus a non-issue with the Hindu population, which is divided into an almost infinite variety of sects, creeds, castes and cults. It is not merely a question of tolerance; but a positive conviction that God is one, whatever the name or form in which He is conceived or invoked, underlies the religious life of a Hindu.

But the devotee revels in multiplying the images of the one God, who, he knows, is really beyond imagination and above all images. he invokes in a thousand names the One God whom speech

cannot reach. He makes icons of the One God, who can never be adequately represented. And he houses in a temple the One God who envelops the entire universe and rises above it by 'ten inches'. The God that transacts with man intellectually and emotionally is never mistaken for the God who is the abstract source of all existence, animate as well as inanimate.

The god that the devotee chooses to worship is an approach to the God who has need neither for worship, nor for the devotee. The god is worshipped for material gains, health, security, and happiness; the god is also worshipped to cleanse the human constitution so that the light of God may shine through it. The latter worship, of course, is the

highest form of worship. But it appeals but to a few; the larger section of the population is content to seek from the gods this or that benefit.

When human beings are in need of gain or comfort, they invent gods according to their own needs, and temperaments. The group-mind then stylizes the forms as well as the rituals connected with these several gods who are but creatures of human need. This is the framework of polytheism. There are gods of diverse shapes, moods and modes of appearance; they are specifically related to the variety of human needs.

The devotee knows that the image of a god is a mere artefact and toy, unless it is properly

consecrated. And consecration involves the investment of the devotee's devotion and passion, and getting the devotee effectively related to the particular god invoked in the image. Rituals are naturally important for transforming an artefact into an icon. The icon is meant to accommodate the rituals, so that human devotion can flower out in the light of God that is reflected through the icon.

Rituals are acts done by the devotee's body, speech and mind. The icon is seen and handled. But it is the first step. The icon must evolve into a verbal image, a concept. This is aided by descriptive hymns, mnemonic words strung into an articulated garland or repetition of power-laden epithets or god. God as a verbal concept (*mantra*),

subtler than the material icon (*mūrti*). But subtler still is the thought-complex (*yantra*) in which speech is transformed into essential ideas that ultimately merge in a 'point' (*bindu*), where God's presence is focussed.

Thus the icon by itself is incomplete; it should be accompanied by its effective verbal counterpart (*mantra*) as well as the appropriate ideational representation (*yantra*). This is an important detail of Indian iconography that is often ignored by writers on the subject. The god suitable for worship is both iconic and graphic; what binds the two aspects is the involvement of stylized articulation.

The craftsman whose job is to fashion icons to fulfil the needs of

devotees must naturally be acquainted with the relevant *mantras* and *yantras*. But more importantly he must be familiar with the descriptive mantras, known as *dhyāna-ślokas*, which specify the posture, the mood, the number of hands, the weapons, decorations and other formal details of the particular icon meant for worship. Many of these *mantras* are mnemonic in character. The training of the traditional sculptor necessarily included committing of these *dhyāna-slokas* to memory, so that he would be ready to translate any stylized verbal image into an equally stylized icon in stone, metal or wood.

The ideal procedure is claimed to be this. When a sculptor is commissioned to fashion the icon of

a particular deity for purposes of worship in a temple, he prepares himself elaborately and meticulously by rituals and regimen. He undertakes to give up the ordinary routine, eschew common company, and withdraw into a sort of serene isolation. He continuously contemplates on the *dhyāna-śloka* of the deity (the image of which he is to fashion) so as to crystallize the image in his mind. He eats his food with this preoccupation, goes to sleep with this thought, and allows no distraction to interfere with this constant and intense contemplation. When the image in the mind is perfectly and enduringly formed, he takes up his tools and gets ready to translate this image into an icon. It is only then that the icon becomes worthy of worship.

The sculptor pours into his work not only the skills of the craft he has acquired, but his spiritual fervour in a sort of penance immediately before he undertakes the work. During this period of preparation, he is so constantly absorbed in the descriptive hymn of the deity that he begins to see the deity alround him and all the time. He can vividly discern the form of the deity in the block of stone or wood that he has selected. He has only to free this form from the block by chipping off the unwanted and obscuring masses, and by chiselling the finer details. The form occurs to him as a revelation, and he is but an instrument in its hands to get itself materialized.

There are numerous texts in

Sanskrit which incorporate such descriptive verses relating to several deities. The Tāntrik manuals of Vajrayāna Buddhist pursuation are especially replete with *dhyāna-ślokas*, for they are props for visualization during sessions of contemplation. They serve the purposes of the meditators as well as the icon-maker. And, true to the intent of the verses, the meditator or icon-maker tends oftentimes to identify himself with the form that he can readily and vividly project. There is a familiar saying that the devotee who is not a deity himself must never worship the deity ('nā-śivo-bhūtvā śivam pūjayet'). This applies equally well to the icon-maker : unless he becomes one with the form of the deity, he can never fashion the form well enough.

This phenomenon explains why some icons exude a compelling power about them, even when their aesthetic quality is not considerable. There are, on the contrary, icons which are very pretty which are nevertheless spiritually flat. Icons acquire power to the extent their makers pour themselves into their handiwork. Texts insist that making of icons for worship must always follow a period of ritualistic preparation of the icon-maker as well as the material chosen for making the icon. Convention again insists that the icon-maker (*śilpin*) must be ceremoniously honoured before the worship for the icon begins, for he is in a sense “the parent of the deity”.

The custom of manufacturing icons for sale is also an old one.

Even in the centuries before Christ, icons were being made as commercial propositions. Pāṇini (5, 3, 96) mentions “*prati-kṛti*” in this sense; Patañjali, the great commentator on this remarkable grammarian, records that Mauryas(?) manufactured icons (*‘archā’*) only for procuring gold (*hiranya*) (*Mahābhāṣya*, 5, 3, 99). But the ancient grammarian also knew that all icons were not made for money (5, 3, 99). Some were not meant to be sold (*apaṇya*), but they served as a means of livelihood (*jīvikārthe*). Some icons that were especially well-made and contained some power, were exhibited before the devotees, who made gifts to the owners of these icons. Sometimes, the priests carried such icons from door to door, collecting fees from the householders for viewing them.

These were obviously small icons, possibly metallic ones, not designed for installation in a temple. The later expressions, used for these 'worshipful ones' (*archās*), viz. 'body' (*vapu*, *tanu*, *vigraha*) and 'form' (*rūpa*) indicate that the icons were no longer regarded as just symbols or reflections (*pratimā*, *bimba*), or representations (*pratīka*, *pratīkṛti*, *sandrś*), but as divinities in their own right. A mere look at them was believed to confer great benefits. The owners of such icons would also arrange to get copies made of them of course for a consideration.

Mathurā, which was situated on the trade routes of the country and was therefore a busy commercial metropolis, became the place where

icon-makers also gathered. Traders and political agents, who belonged to different religious groups (Buddhists, Jains, the Bactrian *bhāgavatas*, sun worshippers, śaivas and the followers of folk cults) visited Mathurā and dwelt there for protracted periods. Icon-makers carried on a flourishing business, catering to their religious needs. There was need to manufacture icons and ritualistic implements and utensils on mass basis.

Art, pressed for a commercial end, naturally departs from the traditional norm, and seeks to adapt to the prevalent fashion. The aesthetic quality also degenerates to an extent, when duplication becomes the frequent need. The craftsman involved in this enterprise can ill

afford to devotee his time for ritualistic preparations or for visualization of the *dhyāna-śloka*; his motivations are different. The icons that he made thus were no longer 'spiritual products', but pieces conforming to a dull and stereotyped convention. A large number of icons that we find now in the country belong to this class of uninspired artefacts. And most of them are very faint and distant reflections of the relevant *dhyāna-ślokas*, because the acquaintance of the craftsman with the textual prescriptions was meagre or second-hand.

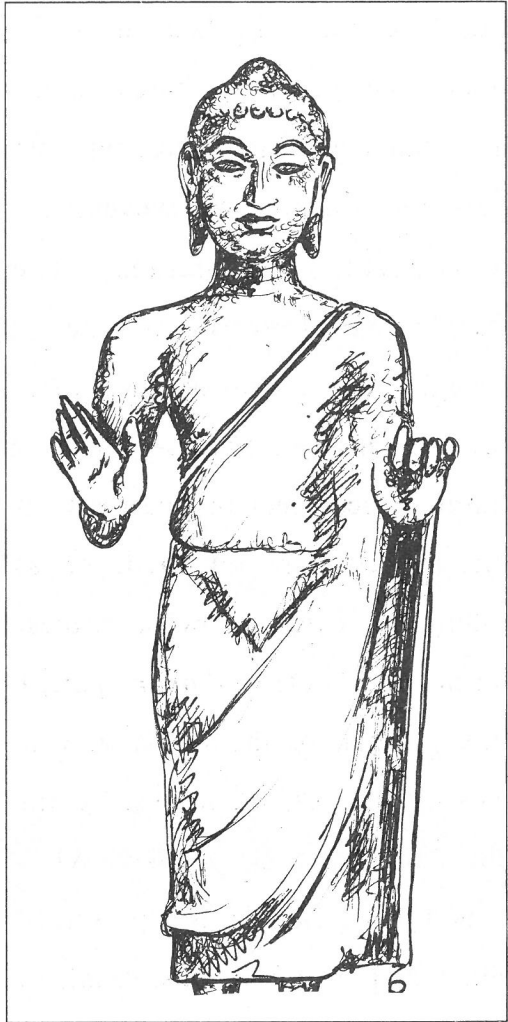
If the craftsman was clever, and the need of the patron unusual, the craftsman would evolve his own style of making an icon, entirely outside the framework of *dhyāna-*

ślokas. And numerous minor divinities and folk-deities which became popular in course of time and in different parts of the country did not have *dhyāna-ślokas* any way; and the craftsman had to follow his own genius and inclination. The custom of making the icons altogether independent of the *dhyāna-ślokas* has continued to this day. The craftsmen do not feel the need to be guided by the canonical texts any more.

There is, however, a provision made in the texts that the icons should conform to the regional styles of dress and decoration (*Brhatsamhitā*). It is also laid down that the craftsman must bring into play his own taste and skill while making an icon, within the broad

traditional framework. The *dhyāna-śloka* specifies the number of hands and the nature of the weapons held in them; but it leaves the artist free to mould the hands, portray the weapons and invent the manner of the hands holding the weapons, in the way he chooses. The *dhyāna-śloka* of a deity may indicate that the icon must be represented in a dancing posture; but it does not specify what the precise posture should be like. The artist has to decide upon the postures depending on his own familiarity with dance-postures.

Simplistic stylization which obviated the necessity of *dhyāna-ślokas* is best illustrated in the images of Buddha and the Jina. While both Buddhist and Jaina icons conform in



general to the traditional framework in which the classical deities were represented, there were some unique features about them. The icons of

the Buddha and the Jinas are to be found only in two postures, sitting and standing. Seated icons of both persuasions are in the conventional lotus-posture (*padmāsana*). The Buddha images are shown either as engaged in contemplation (*dhyāna*) or as teaching (or *chakra-pravartana* ‘turning the wheel of dharma’), as offering comfort (*abhaya*), or as calling the earth below as witness for his own integrity (*bhūmi-sparśa*). The position of the hands vary in these situations, while rest of the body remains rigidly alike. While standing, the Buddha is represented either as preaching (*vyākhyāna*), or as on his begging round.

The images of Jinas are always shown as absorbed in contemplation (*dhyāna*), whether seated (in



padmāsana) or standing in an upright posture known as *khadgāsana* (or the position of a drawn sword). While seated, his hands are poised on his locked legs, the right palm over the left; but while standing, his arms hang down on the sides. The standing posture is commonly known as *kāyotsarga* or *pratimā-yoga*, which expression actually refers to a practice undertaken by the Jain ascetic for heightening the rigour of his austerities (*tapovṛddhi*) and for abandoning the effects of karma (*nirjaraṇa*).

The images of Jinās are altogether nude (although some images of the white-robed sect are shown wearing a strip of cloth covering the genitals), whereas the Buddha is invariably shown as

wearing an upper cloth (*samghāṭi*) in addition to the normal under-robe. Neither the Buddha nor the Jina, however, is shown as wearing any ornament whatsoever.

The differences among the Jina icons become important in view of the fact that twenty-four Jinās (*tīrthankaras*) are recognized, the last of whom was Mahāvīra, contemporaneous with the Buddha. The simplistic stylization would represent all the *tīrthankaras* as exactly alike (with the exception of Pārśvanātha, the twenty-third Jina, whose head is shown as sheltered by a many-hooded serpent). But they are differentiated by the emblems appropriate to the Jinās (like bull for the first Jina, Vṛṣabha-nātha, conch for the 22nd Nemi-nātha, snake for

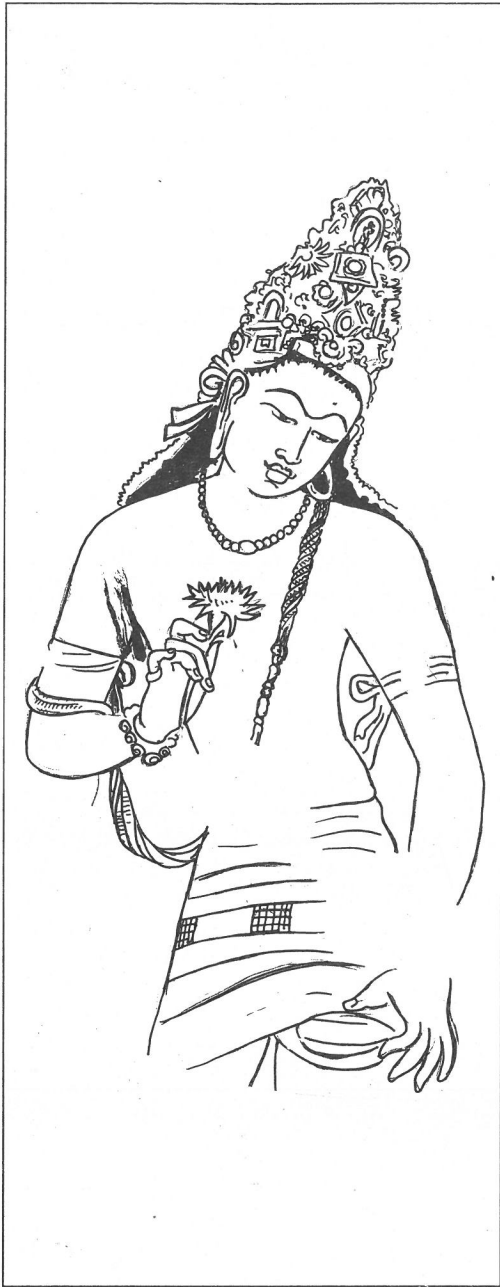
the 23rd, Pārśva-nātha, and lion for the 24th, Mahāvira), carved on the pedestal.

The Bāhubali or Gommaṭa images, which are usually huge monoliths (as the one in Śravaṇa-belgoḷa in Karnāṭaka) are invariably free-standing, with no shelter over them. They are similar in posture to the standing Jina images, except of course for the emblems which are absent in the images of Gommaṭa. On the other hand, the Gommaṭa image is identified by the *mādhavī*-creeper that gracefully entwines the legs, thighs and arms; ant-hills are also shown about the legs.

Icons are classified into four general categories: painted on canvas, paper, wall or pot (*chitraja*),

moulded in clay or any other plastic material like sandal-paste and rice-flour (*lepaja*, *mṛṇmayī*, or *paishṭī*); cast in metal (*pākaja*, *lohaja*, *dhātūttha*); and carved in stone, wood or precious stone (*śastrotkīrṇa* : *śailaja*, *dāravī*, or *ratnaja*). Early icons were made in clay or carved in wood. And the images so prepared were covered by layers of paint, often bright and variegated. This was necessary to preserve the image for a length of time. Stone icons did not need this treatment, although instances of painted stone icons are not rare.

Painting is an early form of art that man mastered, and employed for religious ends. Besides the prehistoric cave-paintings, there are also the painted funerary jars, urns and pots which belong to a distant



past. Iconographic elements may be traced even in these early paintings. But painted pots (*ghaṭa*) and cloth or canvases (*paṭa*) are worshipped in India from very early times. It is not strange, therefore, that drawing and painting are fundamental to iconography.

The icon (*pratimā*) is actually described in the early texts as what is painted on a piece of cloth, on a wall, or on a vessel, clay or metallic ('paṭe, kuḍye, patre cha chitrajā pratimā smṛtā'). The expression was later extended to clay, stone or wooden icons, because painting (*lepa*) continued to be an important aspect of the icon installed for worship.

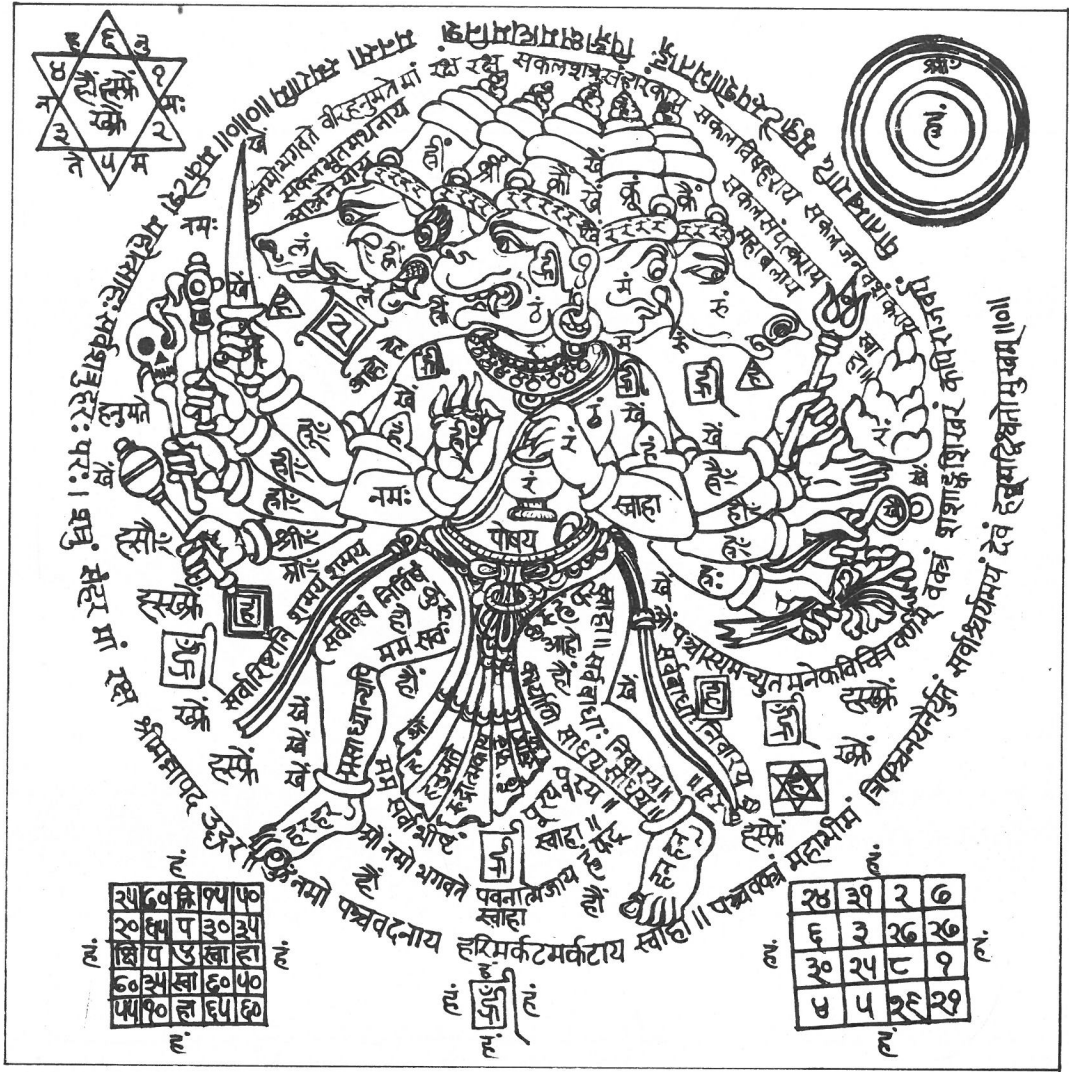
Several early texts on art and architecture (like *Vishṇu-*

dharmottara, *Chitra-lakshana* of Nagnajit which is available only in its Tibetan translation, *Śilpa-ratna*, the 'pata-vidhāna' section of *Ārya-Mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa* and *Hayaśirsha-samhitā* contain detailed information about the painted icons. *Hayaśirsha-samhitā* even goes to the extent of insisting that Vishṇu must be worshipped only in a painting on cloth or canvas ('patasthah pūjanīyas tu devo Nārāyaṇah prabhuh'), for it is only in a painting that charm (*kānti*), ornaments (*bhūshana*) and expressions (*bhāva*) can vividly be portrayed (*sphuṭam*); Vishnu's presence in the painting is constant ('lepye chitre harir nityam sannidhānam upaiti hi').

The *yantras* associated with icons, were always painted in bright colours, although this custom was

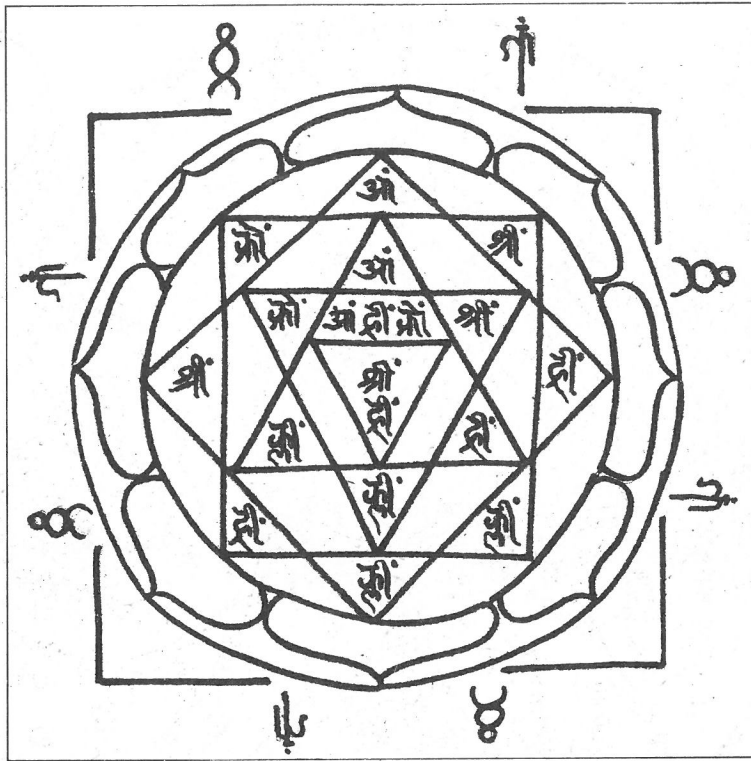
gradually given up. It survived only where Tāntrik rituals were involved. The extensive use of colourful *maṇḍalas* in the Śākta cults as well as in the Vajrayāna aspect of Buddhism is well-known. When the Tāntrik hold weakened, the *yantras* became mainly line-drawings, and as a rule were inscribed on metallic sheets or drawn on paper. The inner spaces of these diagrams were left unfilled so that the appropriate *mantras* (or seed-syllables, *bījāksharas*) could be written in them whenever desired.

Occasionally, the stone or metallic icon would be installed on such *yantras*, with the supposition that the icon would thus acquire greater power; and the worship rituals would involve the articulation of the relevant *mantras*. The three



(pratimā, yantra and mantra) together constitute the theme of Indian iconography.

Iconography strictly means “drawing” or etching of an icon. It refers to a sculptural representation



only by an extension of this meaning. The earlier practice was to draw in lines, sometimes filled with colours also, the image of the deity for purposes of meditation, adoration or worship. Before sculpture in stone or wood appeared, the practice was to draw in outline or sketch on the material. Paintings and drawings to

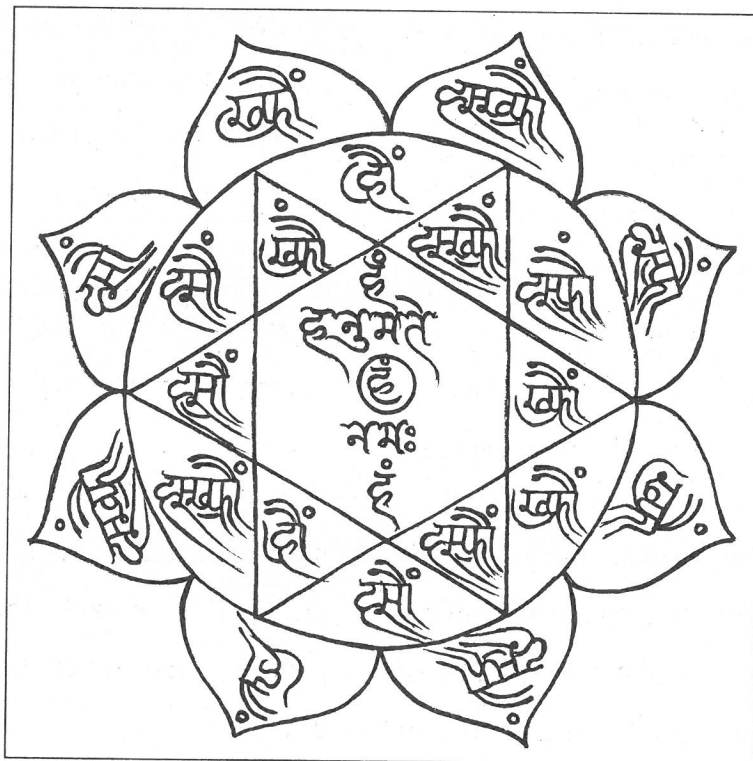
serve an iconographic purpose were in the nature of natural evolutes.

There is a legend that Nārāyaṇa, the great God, drew on earth (*Urvī*) with mango-juice the drawing of a charming feminine form, and infused life into it. Thus was the nymph 'Urvaśī' born. Then

Nārāyaṇa composed texts on painting and iconography and handed them over to the celestial architect-sculptor Viśvakarmā. *Nārada-śilpa* classifies painting into 'those on the ground' (*bhaumika*), 'those on the walls' (murals, and frescoes, *bhitti*), and 'portraits' (*bhāva-chitra*). The

first two were stationary, while the last was meant to be portable.

Portraits and wall-paintings were involved in iconography, the former being regarded as 'mobile' (*chala*) and the latter 'immobile' (*achala*). The wall-paintings were



done in four stages. White-washing the surface of the wall (*dhauta*), mounting a coat of boiled rice on it (*ghaṭṭita*), drawing of the outline in charcoal (*lāñchita*), and finally filling in the colours (*varṇa-rañjita*). The same procedure was followed when, instead of wall, cloth (*paṭa*) was employed as the medium. The manner in which portraits were prepared was slightly different. It was done in the following stages : initial outline drawing (*rekḥāpāta*), modulating the light and shade, and finalising the sketch (*vāstava*), arranging decorative details (*alankāra*), and colouring (*varṇa*).

An old verse mentions that masters are attentive to drawing, experts to modulations, women to decorative details and common

people to bright colours. The import of this verse is that outline sketches are regarded as possessing a relatively high artistic value. Differentiation of forms (*rūpa-bheda*), accommodation of proportions (*pramāṇa*), projection of feelings and aspects of beauty (*bhāva-lāvanya-yojanā*), bringing out the resemblance (*sādṛśya*) and putting the colours on (*varṇikā-bhaṅga*) are regarded as the 'six limbs' of drawing, according to Yaśodhara's gloss on *Kāma-sūtra*.

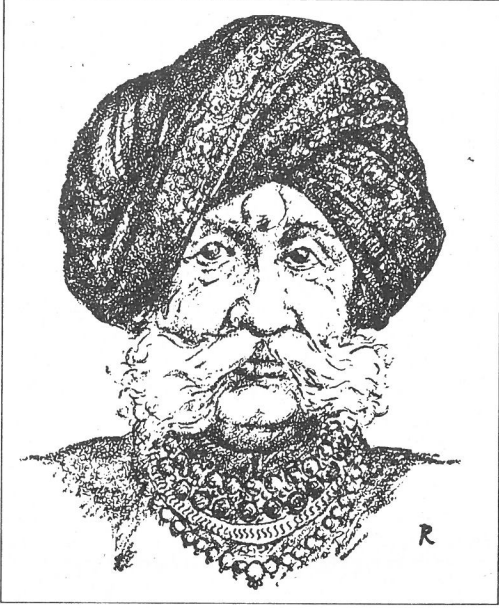
रूपभेदाः प्रमाणानि भावलावण्ययोजना ।
सादृश्यं वर्णिकाभङ्गः षडङ्गं चित्रलक्षणम् ॥

Among the six details that are here enumerated, it is the last one alone that makes the sketch a painting; the other five relate to drawing.

The importance of line-drawing is to be gleaned from numerous medieval treatises on painting like *Vishṇu-dharmottara*, *Samarāṅgaṇa-sūtra-dhāra* (Bhoja), *Abhilashitārtha-chintāmaṇi* (Someśvara), and *Hara-Vijaya* (Ratnākara). And the application of this outlook is to be found in the wall-paintings of Ajaṇṭā, Bāgh, Bādāmi, Sittanavāśal, Hampi Virūpāksha Temple, the Ānegondi palace, Lepākshī Pāpanāśa temple and Vardhamāna temple, Tañjavur Brihadiśvara temple, Śravaṇa-belgoḷa Jaina-maṭha and Seebi-Narasimha temple.

A strong iconographic style evolved from these wall-paintings in two principle divisions : the Jain style in Gujarāt (principally in illustrated manuscripts) and the Tañjavūr style of painting icons on

pots and paper. It is the impetus provided by Tañjavūr style that contributed to the iconographic development in Karnāṭaka, especially under the patronage of the ruler of the erstwhile Mysore State, Kṛṣṇarāja Wodeyar III (1794-1868). This king, who was himself an author of no mean merit, got many iconographic manuals written and also got them profusely illustrated. *Śrī-tattva-nidhi* is an encyclopaedic work in Sanskrit that he got compiled, and this work contains a profuse collection of iconographs. The names of the artists who were responsible for such icono-graphic studies in the Mysore court have come down to us: Veeraṇṇa, Yellayya, Sundarayya, Tañjavūr Koṇḍayya, Nagūnaḷḷi Nāraṇappa and Aḷasiṅgrayya.



Two of the iconographic collections by the king mentioned above are interesting in that they contain not only excellent drawings of the gods and goddesses but also portraits of well-known saints and pontiffs. The first of these books, *Devatā-nāma-musuma-mañjarī*, (in two parts) written about 1859, contains 1, 178 verses in Sanskrit, descriptive of several gods popularly

worshipped in the South, and also minor deities (like Bali, Kārtavīrya, Manmatha and Vyāsa) mentioned in older iconographic manuals.

The other book *Devatā-dhyāna-mālikā*, is a smaller one, containing only 236 verses in Sanskrit describing sixty icons. Both these books, the authorship of which is ascribed to the king himself, are profusely illustrated with remarkable line-drawings, slightly coloured. The artistic merit of the iconographs of the former book contains some unusual representations of forgotten deities like Pratyāṅgirā, Śimśumāra, Nidrā and Jvalajjihvā. The iconographs are authoritative as they correctly accord in most cases with the classical descriptions contained in the manuals.

CHAPTER XI

ICONS FOR WORSHIP RITUALS

Mention has already been made of polytheism being an essential characteristic of Hinduism, and thus being fundamental to Indian Iconography. Innumerable are the deities that receive worship from the Indian masses, from earliest of times to the present day. In fact, the number of deities that merit adoration is increasing over years. Besides the major gods and goddesses that have scriptural sanction and are of national status (like Vishṇu, Śiva, Gaṇeśa, Durgā, Hanumān), numerous heroes, saints and benefactors of regional significance are periodically accorded divine or semi-divine status; and

people look upon them as incarnations or emanations with peculiarities of their own. Cultic and folk deities form the bulk of Indian polytheism.

Generally, however, five deities constitute the normal or core pantheon of Hinduism : Vishṇu and Śiva (both of whom have a Vedic background), Devī (the mother-goddess who goes back to a more remote past), Gaṇeśa (the folk god of universal appeal in our country), and Sūrya (the solar divinity, whose cult has been popular all over the world at some time or other). The Sun (Sūrya) is often regarded as an

aspect of Viṣṇu (Sūrya-nārāyaṇa), and is represented by Fire (Agni), especially the sacrificial fire. Thus, in effect, there are four major divinities.

But the custom of pentadic worship (*pañchopāsana*) has gained currency in the country. It is difficult to ascertain when exactly this custom commenced, but we find it recommended in the *Purāṇas* and the *smṛti*-texts. Śamkarāchārya (early 7th cent) is supposed to have been responsible for its prevalence. But we find nothing about it in any of his authentic works; and from what he says about worship, it appears unlikely that he encouraged this pentadic worship.

The custom is closely associated with the concept of

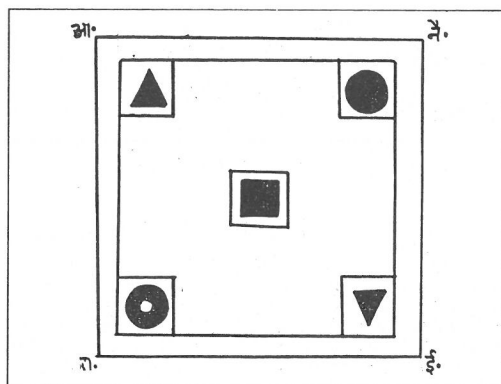
monotheistic primacy of the deity of the devotee's choice (*ishṭadevatā*). The arrangement of the five gods on a common platform would signify their equal status. At the four corners and the centre of a square base (*vedī*) would be located the five deities. But a Śaivite, for instance, would place Śiva in the centre and the other four deities in the four corners. A Vaishṇavite, on the other hand, would make Viṣṇu occupy the central position. There is thus a sectarian involvement in the arrangement of the five deities.

The pre-supposition is that the central deity is in fact the only deity receiving worship, the other four being only aspects of this central deity. There is thus a monotheistic tendency even in the pentadic worship. There were during the

VISHṆU	▼
GAṆEŚA	●
DEVĪ	▲
SŪRYA	■
ŚIVA	◉

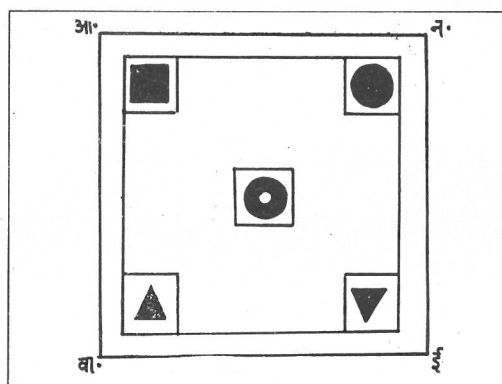
middle ages, five
sects that had
b e c o m e
important : the
Ś a i v i t e s
worshipping
Śiva, the
Vaishṇavites
devoted to

Vishṇu, the
Śāktas given to the cult of Devī
(Śakti), the Gāṇapatyas adoring
Gaṇapati, and the Sauras
worshipping the Sun. Each sect
looked upon its object of adoration
as the God, but accepted the gods
of other sects also.

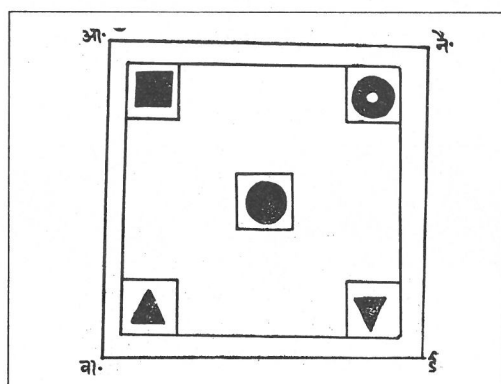


Gaṇeśa - pañchāyatana

The devotee given to the
pentadic worship does not actually
worship five gods; he worships only
the God, but accepts the other gods
as belonging to the same family
(*parivāra*). The texts explain that, in
accordance with the five elements
that ultimately are the stuff of which
the entire universe is made, human



Vishṇu - pañchāyatana



Sūrya - pañchāyatana

beings are of five types : the earth type, the water type, the fire type, the air type, and the ākāśa type. Although the elemental predominance is the distinguishing feature, no element can possibly do without the other. In due consideration of the elemental types ('pratyeka tattva-prāchuryam vimṛśya vidhi-pūrvakam'), the pentadic worship is instituted.

The association of the five elements with the five deities is variously given. However, the commonly accepted correspondances are : Gaṇapati-earth; Śiva-water; Devī-fire; Sūrya-air; and Viṣṇu-ākāśa. There is another account where Śiva corresponds to the earth element and Gaṇapati to water. They are

represented by distinctive *yantras* in order; square (*chaturśra*), crescent moon or hexagon (*shaṭkoṇa*), triangle (*trikoṇa*), circle (*vṛtta*) and dot (*bindu*).

The five deities are represented on the platform either by these geometrical designs, or by icons. More frequently, however, they are represented by five natural objects: Gaṇapati by a red stone (*rakta-prastara-khaṇḍa*), Śiva by white quartz from rivers like Narmadā (*bāṇa-linga*), Devī by metallic stone (*dhātupatra* or *yantra*), Sūrya by crystal (*sphaṭika*), and Viṣṇu by ammonite from Gaṇḍakī river (*śālagrāma*).

The positions of the four deities with respect to the central deity are

specified in the texts. The deities being on the same platform, worship offered to the central (main) deity is shared by the other deities. Each deity has a *gāyatri* formula of its own, and the sectarian worshipper will utter the *gāyatri* of the central deity during worship.

1. Gaṇapati :

‘Tat purushāya (or karataya) vidmahe, vakratuṇḍāya dhīmahi, tan no Dantih prachodayāt’

2. Śiva :

‘Tat purushāya vidmahe, Mahādevaya dhīmahi, tan no Rudrah prachodayāt’

3. Devī :

‘Tad ganga-gauchyāya vidmahe, Girisutāya dhīmahi, tan no Gaurī prachodayāt’

4. Surya :

‘Tad bhāskaraya vidmahe, Prabhakāraya dhīmahi, tan no Bhānuh prachodayāt’

5. Viṣṇu :

‘Tat Keshavāya vidmahe, Nārāyaṇāya dhīmahi, tan no Viṣṇuh prachodayāt’

The philosophical interpretation of the pentadic worship has been given in some texts. Gaṇapati, as the lord of the group of fourteen worlds, signifies the phenomenon of bondage, which obstructs the dawn of enlightenment (hence called Vighneśvara). Sūrya is the principle behind creation (from the root ‘sū’ to produce). Viṣṇu is responsible for the preservation of the created world, and Śiva for its destruction. Devī is the principle of

the power of wisdom (*jñāna-śakti*) which liberates the devotee from phenomenal bondage. It is well-known that Gaṇapati is worshipped for worldly success, Sūrya for health, Viṣṇu for wealth, Śiva for dispassion, and Devī for the liberating wisdom. Further, the five elements that are represented by the five deities are translated into the five constituents of the inner constitution of man : earth-ego (*aḥamkāra*), water-object awareness (*chitta*), fire-primary consciousness (*buddhi*), air-mind (*manas*), and ether-‘the heart’ (*hṛdaya*, the seat of consciousness). Thus, this mode of worship is sought to be integrated into conceptual and symbolic framework.

Each of the five deities has many iconic forms in which it is

worshipped. Examples are Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Narasimha, Trivikrama and Hayagrīva, (among the forms of Viṣṇu), Vīrabhadra, Bhairava, Dakṣiṇā-mūrti and Naṭatāja (among the forms of Śiva), Kālī, Tripura-sundarī, Lakshmī, Mahisha-mardhinī and Kanyā-kumārī (among the forms of Devī), Siddhi-Vināyaka, Heramba, Śakti-Gaṇapati and Haridrā-Gaṇapati (among the forms of Gaṇapati).

Sūrya, however, does not appear in many forms. Usually he is represented as standing with two hands holding lotus flowers, drawn in a chariot to which several horses are yoked and driven by Aruṇa (“the dawn”). He is often represented as the chief among the nine planets (*grahas*).

When the deity has iconic variants, there is usually a legend

to justify the iconic details like the posture, number of hands, weapons and expressions. The *Purāṇas*, some of which are sectarian (like *Śiva-purāṇa* for Śaivas, *Vishṇu-purāṇa* for Vaishṇavas, *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa* for Śāktas, *Mudgala-purāṇa* for the Gāṇapatyas) contain these legends. And as part of the worship, these legendary accounts are read in order to crystallize the iconic form of the deity that is worshipped.

The pentadic worship is current among the followers of the Smṛti-texts (the Smārtas), who owe allegiance to one or the other of the monastic institutions claiming to have been founded by the great Śamkarāchārya. The Vaishṇavas or the Śāktas, however, do not recognise this mode of worship,

although they do honour and worship the other four deities (besides their own chosen deities viz. Vishṇu or Devī), separately and on different occasions. Their daily worship is conducted exclusively to Vishṇu or Devī.

Whether Śaivas, or Vaishṇavas, the Devī is invariably worshipped along with Śiva or Vishṇu. She becomes some form of Durgā when associated with Śiva, and of Lakshmī when associated with Vishṇu. Gaṇapati is also commonly worshipped, though exclusive worshippers of Gaṇapati (the Gāṇapatyas) are extremely rare now. The sun is adored during the *sandhyā*-ritual, but not in any iconic form except as one of the nine planets.

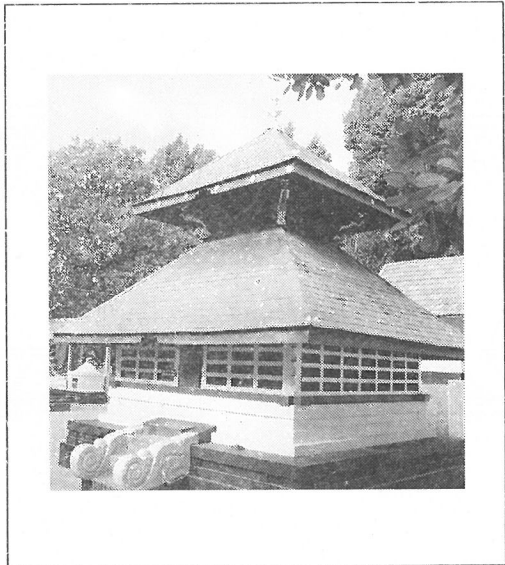


Ganeśa modelled after Bāla-Krishna

Iconic differences are usually indicated by the posture (*bhangī*), the number of hands (*hasta*), weapons (*āyudha*), ornaments (*bhūshaṇa*), hand-gestures (*mudrā*) and facial expressions (*bhāva*). The postures can be seated, standing, reclining or mobile. Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa is often shown as a child on all fours (*Bāla-kṛṣṇa*), or as an infant lying on its back on a leaf of the banyan tree (*Vaṭapatra-śāyin*).

We find Gaṇapati also being represented as a child moving about on all fours, but rarely. No other deity is represented in this posture.

Seated and standing are common positions in which icons of all deities are represented. But there may be variations in these postures. While seated, the posture may be easy and relaxed (*Mahārāja-līlā*,



e.g. Gaṇapati, and Para-vāsudeva), alert, lotus-like (*padmāsana*), e.g. Mūkāmbikā, Lakshmī, Sarasvati, Brahmā, Tīrthankara and Buddha), riding an animal (*vāhana*, e.g. Ganga on the makara), in a Yogic stance (*yoga-paṭṭa*, e.g. Yogā-Narasimha, Dakṣiṇāmūrthi and Śāstā), or with one of the legs bent (*Kuñchitapada*, e.g. Sadāśiva, Samhāra-Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Lakshmī-Nārāyaṇa, Lakshmī-Narasimha and Lalaitā).

While seated or standing, it is usual for the Viṣṇu and Śiva images to be accompanied by their consorts in the same posture (Lakshmī and Pārvatī respectively). Rāma with Śītā, Śiva with Gaurī, Sūrya with Chhāyā, Gaṇeśa with Lakshmī, Narasimha with Lakshmī, Naṭarāja with Śivakāmī are common

examples. There are some gods who have consorts on either side of them: Viṣṇu, for instance, with Bhū-devī (the goddess of earth) and Śrī-devī (the goddess of wealth); Subramanya with Deva-senā (personified army of gods) and Vallī (a human spouse); Gaṇapati with Siddhi (success) and Buddhi (wisdom); and Kṛṣṇa with Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā.

If the god is alone, it is called 'kevala'. Several Viṣṇu and Śiva icons answer to this descriptions : Para-Vāsudeva, Yogā-Narasimha, Bāla-Kṛṣṇa, Veṇu-Gopāla, Kevala-Hayagrīva, Śrīnivāsa, Dhanvantari, Bhairava, Vīrabhadra, Bhikṣhātana, Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Dattātreya, Śāstā and Śarabheśvara. It is usual for Gaṇeśa images to be represented alone, although in some forms (e.g. Śakti-

Gaṇapati, Lakshmī-Gaṇapati and Ucchishṭa-Gaṇapati) he is shown with one, two or eight consorts. Bāla-Subramanya is likewise a loner, but in some forms he has two consorts. Hanumān and Garuḍa are invariably single icons, and so is Sudarśana.

The standing posture involves the delineration of flexions or bends (*bhaṅgī*). When the plumblime passes through the navel (*nābhi*) from the tip of the crown (*śikhāmaṇi*) to a point between the two heels on the pedestal (*pīṭha*), it is 'samabhaṅga'; upright, symbolising perfect poise. This position is devoid of any bends, and the body is held erect, firm and even rigid. The images of the tīrthankaras in the *kāyotsarga* posture are excellent illustrations.



Mañjuśrī - a Vajrayāna divinity

However, to heighten the aesthetic effect, bends are delicately introduced. If it is only a slight bend in both the upper and lower parts of the body, it is *abhaṅga*; if the bend is conspicuous and great it is *atibhaṅga*. If there are three bends noticeable (the plumb-line passes through one of the eye-pupils and descends to the middle of the chest, and then it passes through one side of the navel, right or left, and finally

comes down to the heels) it is *tribhaṅga* (head, trunk and lower limbs). When the sweep of the curve in this posture is imphasized ("like a tree caught in a storm"), it becomes *atibhaṅga*.

Feminine and dancing deities are shown in *abhaṅga* and *tribhaṅga* postures. The *atibhaṅga* is a rare posture, especially in sculpture. But drawings of Vajrayāna divinities in Tibet frequently employ this posture, the excessive flexion being suggestive of violent passion (*krodha*).

Vishṇu is shown in the dance stance only as Kṛshṇa (Kāliya-Kṛshṇa, dancing on the hood of the dragon Kāliya, Navanīta-Kṛshṇa, dancing with balls of butter in one hand or in both hands). A pillar in the temple atop the Tirumalai hills

shows Narasimha dancing; and this is altogether a rare depiction. Śiva as Naṭarāja is a celebrated image. But there are several variant postures in this, which are not so well known as the famous Tiruvalaṅgāḍu icon. Gaṇapati and Sarasvatī are also shown sometimes as dancing. Several Devīs with Tāntrik background, like Kālī and Aparājītā, are also shown in dancing postures, or in semidancing (*ālīḍha*) postures.

Reclining is a posture that is almost exclusive to Viṣṇu. Ranganātha in Śrīraṅgam Anantaśayana in Trivandrum and Śeṣhaśayana (terra-cotta in the 5th cent. temple at Bhiṭargāon and relief in stone from Deogarh, 6th cent.) are familiar examples. Rāma is occasionally depicted in this posture, with Lakshmaṇa sitting at his head

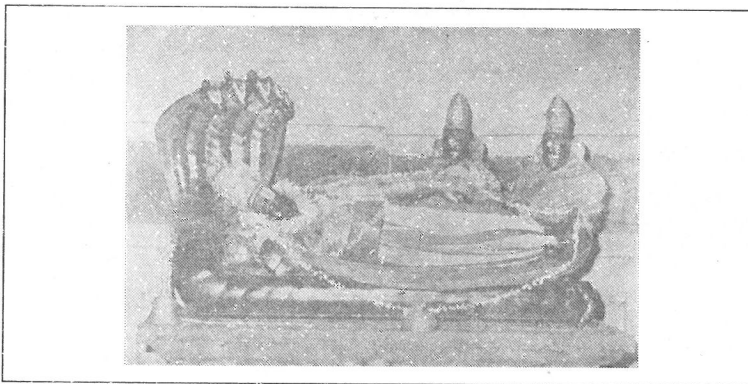


*An unusual pose of dancing Narasimha
on a pillar in the Tirumalai temple*

and Hanumān standing at the feet,
as in a Vijayanagar panel. This panel

may alternately be an illustration of
the episode of Lakshmaṇa fainting
during the great war, and Rāma
deputing Hanumān to bring the
sañjivanī drug.

Mobile postures include Viṣṇu
as Varāha rescuing the Earth, as
Trivikrama measuring the upper
regions, as Narasimha rushing out
of the pillar to slay the demon, and
as Veṇugopāla playing the flute (in
a standing posture); Śiva as the
conqueror of the three realms



Viṣṇu as Ranganātha

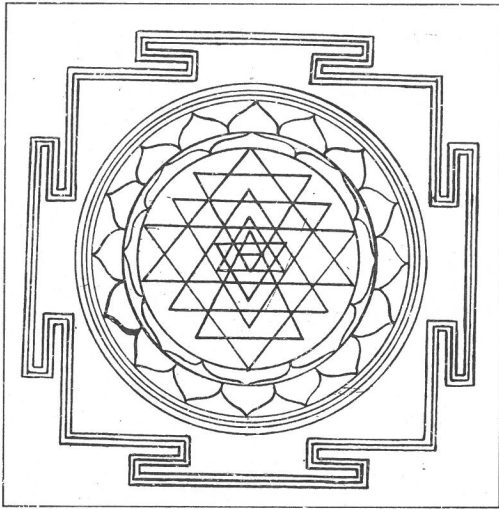
(Tripurāri), as the ascetic on his begging round (Bhikshāṭana), and as Vīrabhadra destroying Daksha's sacrifice; and Devī as Durgā setting out to kill the buffalo-demon, Mahisha, and as Tārā shooting arrows.

For main worship, however, the seated and standing postures of the deities are preferred : it is usual, therefore, to find such postures in the sanctum of the temple (with some exceptions like Śrīraṅgam). Viṣṇu is usually represented as standing, and Śakti as seated, either on a seat (*pīṭha*) or on lion.

For seated figures, texts like *Ahīrbudhnya-samhitā*, prescribe as many as eleven variant postures, 'lotus' (*padma*), 'tortoise' (*kūrma*), 'peacock' (*mayūra*), 'cock'

(*kukkuṭa*), 'lion' (*simha*), 'heroic' (*vīra*), *svastika*, 'firm' (*bhadra*), 'free' (*mukta*), 'cowhead' (*gomukha*), or in a tāntrik diagram (*chakra*). Usually, however, the lotus-posture is employed by sculptors.

The seats on which the iconic representations are lodged also figure in various forms : circular (*padmāsana*), rectangular (*simhāsana*), triangular (*anantāsana*), octagonal (*yogāsana*), hexagonal (*vimalāsana*) and so on. It is also customary to use detachable seats of different forms in different stages of the worship ritual like *simhāsana* for bathing, *yogāsana* for invocation, *anantāsana* for witnessing amusements, and *vimalāsana* for receiving the offering made.



Linear representation of Sri-Chakra

Speaking of the geometrical forms, we need to remember that all icons have their graphic representations (*yantras*) as well as verbalizations (*mantras*). During the worship, the yantras are prepared and employed, and mantras are chanted. The Devi is often worshipped in the 'Śrī-chakra', either as a linear diagram (*rekhā-yantra*) or as an aniconic image

(*meru*). This is regarded as the most powerful of the yantras. It is also most intricate in its design, and the worship involves an elaborate ritual.

The objects of worship are broadly grouped into two sorts : abstract (*nishkala*) and concrete (*sakala*). The abstract is without a material representation : it consists merely of an imagery or a thought-construct. It is unmanifest (*avyakta*), so far as the worship situation is concerned. The concrete, on the other hand, is an icon, the handiwork of an artist-craftsman which represents the traditional idea of a worshipful deity. It can be practically involved in the worship ritual. It is usual to have the iconic representation in imitation of the human form. *Parama-samhitā* (3, 5,

10) explains the anthropomorphic necessity of iconic representations :

“Worship can be done only for the deity with form, and not for an abstract idea. It is therefore that icons are made. They help concentration, contemplation, adoration and worship. The icon is a representation of the deity, and whatever is offered to the icon is really received by the deity. The devotee being human, he can communicate well with an icon with the human form. The human being therefore will reach the highest goal conceiving the really abstract Godhead in a human form, and worshipping the icon with great devotion”.

It is usual therefore for concrete objects of adoration in India to be human in aspect. Such objects

have limbs and meanings (*sa-kala*). Instances are the Vishṇu images, images of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the sportive forms of Śiva, and the icons of goddesses like Lakshmī and Durgā, as also several minor divinities. There are also several composite deities included in this group. Animal-human admixtures in the iconic representations are not unusual. Consider, as instances, Ganeśa (god with elephant's head) Nara-simha ('man-lion') Haya-grīva (human form with the horse's head), Pratyāṅgirā (goddess with the lion's head) and Kākamukhī (a *yoginī* with the face of a crow).

Several iconic representations involve humanization of animals : animals represented in human forms. We have the icons of Hanumān

(monkey), Garuḍa (kite), Nandi (bull), Subrahmaṇya (serpent), Dakṣha (ram), and incarnations of Viṣṇu such as Matsya (fish), Kūrma (tortoise), Varāha (boar), and Kalki (horse). Elemental principles have also been endowed with iconic forms: fire (Agni), air (Vāyu), water (Varuṇa), Sun (Sūrya), mountains (like the Kailāsa, Meru and Vindhya), rivers (Gangā, Yamunā and Kāverī), trees and plants (like Aśvattha and Tulasī) have also their iconic representations with human involvement.

Viṣṇu in his twenty-four forms according to (*Agni-Purāṇa*) is conspicuously and almost invariably represented as pleasantly human, although his worship is also conducted through the aniconic *śālagrāma* stone. Śiva, on the other

hand, is usually worshipped in the aniconic *linga* form, although he has about twenty sportive forms (*līlā-mūrtis*) which are human in delineation. Aniconic representation comprehends both the abstract and concrete sorts; it is described as 'ubhaya' (both) or 'miśrita' (combined). The expression 'linga' strictly means a sign, a symbol. The aniconic *linga* is the symbol or an index of divine presence and power. It has no readily recognizable human or animal, or composite form. It is not, in this sense, concrete. But it does have a material shape with identifiable parts (like the *pīṭha*, *Gaurī-paṭṭa*, *linga* and *vajra*). Sometimes a human face is projected on the *linga* part (*mukha-linga*); or Śiva is represented as coming out of the *linga* (*lingodbhava-*

mūrti). Whatever the details, the linga is a shape that symbolizes the abstract idea of Godhead.

Icons are again divided into 'immobile' (*achala*) and 'mobile' (*chala*). The former are usually carved out of a monolith and fixed to the pedestal in the sanctum. It may be iconic like the representation of Viṣṇu or Durgā; or it may be aniconic like the linga of Śiva. Oftentimes, the Devī images are also represented in the form of a linga, especially in the coastal region. It is not unusual to find even Viṣṇu images so represented; many Ranganātha and Narasimha shrines in the South contain only lingas in the sanctum.

While the stationary icon in the sanctum is doubtless the main

object of worship in a temple, it is not suitable for all the rituals enjoined in the texts and stylized in tradition. Portable images made in metal are, therefore, meant to officiate for the main icon in the rituals which are conducted outside the sanctum.

The mobile or portable icons are prescribed to be exact replicas in metal of the stationary stone icon in the sanctum. But when the main object of worship in the sanctum is an aniconic linga, its mobile counterpart will be Śiva or Devī in a human iconic representation. It is altogether unusual to find the linga form among the mobile icons. The sportive forms of Śiva were first stylized in metal, and it is only later that the forms were imitated in stone. Divinities

belonging to the Śiva group, viz., Durgā, Gaṇapati, Kārtikeya (known by several names such as Subrahmaṇya, Kumāra and Skanda) and Nandi are, like the Viṣṇu images, human and iconic in form, both in the stationary and portable versions.

The icons in human form are further classified into three types, depending on their bodily postures : seated (*āsīna*), standing (*sthita*) and recumbent (*śayāna*). There are, however, other postures also, like dancing (Naṭarāja), measuring the heavens (Trivikrama), killing the demon (Durgā and sportive forms of Śiva in the destructive aspects, (*samhāra-mūrtis*), running (Hanumān), fighting (Vīrabhadra, Aghora) and teaching (Dakṣiṇā-

mūrti, Vyāsa and images of teacher-saints).

But these (with the exception of Durgā images) are not usually icons meant for main worship; they serve an occasional or accessory function. We do not, therefore, frequently find these postures depicted in the immobile icon in the sanctum or its chief mobile representative. The main icons of worship are chiefly standing, occasionally seated (mostly goddesses and Gaṇeśa) and rarely recumbent (as the Ranganātha or Anantaśayana images). The portable icons meant for processional purpose will be as a rule in the standing posture, even when their originals in the sanctum are seated or reclining.

The ritual sequences in the temple necessitate several portable icons. In the Viṣṇu temples it is a common practice to have four such images in addition to the immobile and main icon in the sanctum (*pañchabera* system). The normal temple-tiruvāls involve bathing the deity (*snapanā*); making the first offering of food to it, and then in its presence to the attendant deities (*bali*); processions on the roads round the temple (*utsava*); and an assembly of devotees for several purposes in front of the deity (*koluvu, sabhā*). One can see that offering food to the attendant deities, processions and assemblies are ceremonies that have to be gone through only outside the sanctum. Even elaborate bathing is hard to be conducted within the small enclosure

of the sanctum. Portable icons would naturally have to be used for these purposes.

Bathing the deity is an important ritual. In the Śiva shrines, ceremonial bath is given to the main *linga* in the sanctum every day (and several times during the day on occasions), and a mobile icon for this purpose is seldom used. But in many Viṣṇu temples, the main icon is not given a bath every day; in the great temple at Tirumala-Tirupati, for instance it is given once a week, on Friday.

Many early icons are not in granite or sandstone which stand frequent washing. When the main image is wooden (as Jagannāthapuri in Orissa or the earlier Varadarāja

shrine at Kāñchīpuram, Tamiḻ-Nāḍu), daily bath is ruled out, for the wood would decay. Many of such icons are painted over and are permanently decorated. Or the icon may be a stucco brick and mortar (*sudhā*) work, as are the main images in Śrīrangam (Ranganātha) and Kāñchīpuram (Ulagaṇḍa-Perumāḷ), both in Tamiḻ-Nāḍu. Normal bath in this case would damage the icon; special preparations (like *taila-kāppu* in Śrīrangam) are to be made in order to preserve the icon.

Even images carved out of soft stone would wear out by frequent baths, as can be seen in Paḷani (the original icon) and Tirucchengoḍe (Ardha-nārī) in Tamiḻ-Nāḍu. Marble (which is a kind of chalk, *calcium carbonate*) would also suffer by

continuous exposure to water. It is, therefore, that a metallic image is specially assigned to receive the daily bath that is actually meant for the main icon in the sanctum. This icon is known as *snapana-bera*.

After the daily food is offered to the main deity, the scriptural prescription is that other deities who are attendant (*parivāra-devatas*) and resident within the temple enclosure, as well as spirits and goblins that hover round the shrine, must be fed. This is called 'bali-haraṇa', or carrying the sanctified food to the attendant deities, with the permission of the main deity to whom alone all offerings are made. These attendant deities would be symbolized by the *bali*-stones (or altars) that are located in several

spots within the premises of the temple, the principal one being right in front of the sanctum. The procession of priests who carry the food-offerings to these altars is led by another small metallic icon who is supposed to deputize for the main and immobile icon in the sanctum. This icon is known as *bali-bera*.

In most of the Śiva shrines, the *bali*-icon will be in the form of a trident (*tri-śūla*) or a spear (*śūla*), as also in many Devī shrines. In the Viṣṇu shrines, however, it will be a replica of the main icon, or a conventional Viṣṇu in the standing (*sthānaka*) posture. In any case, the *bali*-icon will be a small one, and is often carried about by a priest in his arms or on his head. In the more affluent temples, however, a

palanquin (*śibikā*) is used for the purpose.

Processions round the town on occasions is a regular feature in all temples. And for this purpose, a specially prepared metallic icon (*utsava-bera*), richly decorated with ornaments and flowers is taken out on several stylized vehicles (*vāhanas*) such as chariot (*ratha*), horse (*aśva*), elephant (*gaja*), sun and moon, the celestial tree (*kalpa-taru*), the bull (*vṛṣhabha*), the kite (*garuḍa*), and Hanumān.

Most of the celebrated South Indian bronzes belong to the variety of processional images. They will be of considerable height, although the canonical prescription is that a mobile icon should not exceed

sixteen (according to a variant authority, nine) *aṅgulas* in height. If an icon exceeds this limit, it should be regarded as a stationary image although metallic, and should not be carried about.

Besides these iconic and aniconic representations, several *maṇḍalas* or *yantras* (also called *chakras*) are installed in many shrines for ceremonial worship. Such a device is essentially aniconic, but an intricate geometrical pattern predominates here. The basic form is a triangle, representing spiritual energy of the mother-goddess. The *yantra* has been characterized as symbolic of the cosmos in its entirety. The most well-known of the *yantras* is the *śrī-yantra* (or *śrīchakra*), which is composed of 43

triangles (*trikoṇa*), 28 'secret' spots (*marma-sthāna*, the meeting place of three lines), 24 'joints' (*sandhi*, where two lines meet). The design is an integration of nine *chakras*, four of Śiva (the 'male' principle) and five of 'Śakti' (the 'female' principle), which are superimposed on each other to show the union of the two principles. The whole *yantra* is said to be a representation of the Devī, Rāja-rājeśvarī. There is a corpus of Tāntrik commentarial literature explaining the significance of this *yantra* and prescribing the details of ritualistic worship.

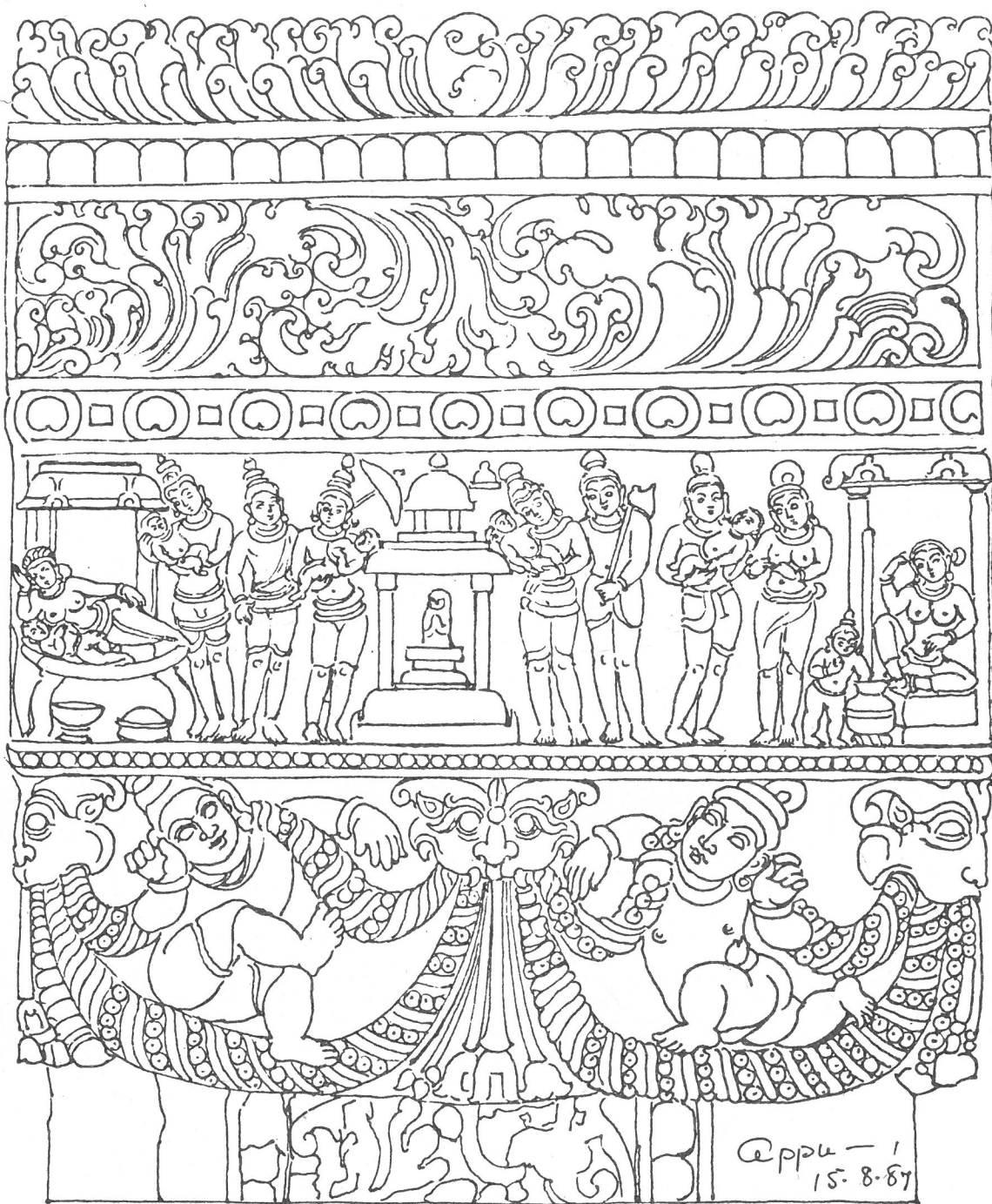
There are two types of representation of this *yantra*, graphic and iconic. The first type is where the *yantra* is inscribed (or etched) on a flat copper plate (or a gold or

silver sheet). The second type is an aniconic representation like the linga, sculpted in quartz, crystal, gem or stone, or cast in metal, usually *pañchaloha*. This second representation is styled Meru as it resembles the mythical mountain of that name. There are several temples in South India where the worship of Śrīchakra figures prominently, like Kāñchīpuram (Kāmakoti), Chidambaram (Sammelana-Chakra), Kurtālam, Avaḍaiyār-koyil, Jambukeśvara (Lalitā), Śringerī (Śāradā), Kollūr (Mūkāmbikā) and Tiruviḍaimuḍuḍur.

Among the aniconic Śrīchakra, the one carved in crystal or made in gold is said to be the best, after

which comes the one made in silver; and next in merit is the one made in copper or alloy of five metals. There is no size restriction when it is carved in stone, crystal or gem; but when cast in metal the weight of the metal should not exceed eight *tolas*.

The specimens are of three types : 'mobile' (*chara*), which are infused with life every time they are worshipped, 'stationary' (*achala* or *sthira*), which are permanently installed at a place, and 'fit to be worn' (*dhāraṇayogya*), viz. which are suitable for being carried on ones body, either as a pendant in a necklace or inscribed on a ring.



CHAPTER XII

WORSHIP IN TEMPLES

The temple is distinguished from a household shrine not only in its structure and organization but also in its rituals and forms of worship. The worship manuals known as 'āgamas' lay down procedural details for worship in a temple, while worship in the household shrine is largely ruled by family traditions and customs.

Worship in the household shrine is by necessity a simple ritual of comparatively short duration, conducted mostly but once a day (in the morning at no fixed time). Generally, the head of the family or some older member of the

household would attend to it; and he does it not only for himself but on behalf of all the members of the household. Actual participation in the worship, however, is not obligatory for the other members. Even when the ritual tends to be elaborate, there would be little of ostentation and less of formality.

Worship in a temple is characteristically elaborate, and is conducted three, five or six times during twenty-four hours. In many of the more famous temples, worship rituals are almost continuous during the day and stretch far into the night. And the ritual sequences are meant

to attract and impress crowds of devotees. The priests who officiate in temples carry out the worship not for their own sake but for the sake of the public, the state and for the welfare of all humanity (so at least the scriptures say). In fact, the priest employed in a temple is expected to finish his own household worship before he comes to the temple.

Worship in the household shrine is largely guided by family traditions and customs rather than by set rules, although there tends to be some uniformity in the rituals owing to belongingness to religious groups. But the worship-manuals known as 'āgamas' describe procedural details for worship in a temple both elaborately and with precision. They have done it so

consistently and for so long that worship in the temples has acquired considerable uniformity despite sectarian affiliations (like Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Śākta).

While it is true that temples in the South differ from the temples in the North both with regard to their structures and to their ritual details, closer inquiry would reveal that these differences are more apparent than real, more superficial than deep. It may appear at first glance that the hold of the 'āgamas' is stronger in South Indian temples than in their North Indian counterparts, but among the more celebrated temples in the North (like Vārāṇasī, Dwārakā, Puri-Jagannāth, Kāmākhyā, Badarī etc.) 'āgamas' do play a very significant role in the

worship procedures. But the 'āgamas' of the North Indian temples have not been either as numerous or as widely familiar as the 'āgamas' in the South. When, however, the two classes of the 'āgamas' are compared, they will be found to contain prescriptions which are very similar and symbolism, derived from a common source.

The most significant aspect of the worship in a temple is its collective character. Worship in a household shrine is termed 'svārtha' (viz. for the sake of one who worships, or for his immediate family), while worship in a temple is carried out by the priest for the sake of others, and hence called 'parārtha' (viz. for the sake of other devotees who gather there). The

temple is a public place, and belongs to the community. the priest who worships there expects to be compensated in some way (such as wages, donations by the devotees, provisions by the management, share in the proceeds etc.). The privilege to conduct the actual worship in a temple is not acquired solely by heredity, or by inclination or even by proficiency in the 'āgamas'; it has to be conferred by the management of the temple, the trustees or administrators on behalf of the entire community, by a contractual arrangement. The priest in the temple worships only in return to the benefits he has access to. Therefore, the worship that he conducts is in fact symbolic of the worship conducted by the community.

Because the community is actually or symbolically involved in the worship conducted in the temple, the rituals acquire a public character. Worship must be carried out in full view of the devotees that have gathered there. In the temple architecture, a provision is always made for a viewers' hall in front of the sanctum called *nava-ranga*, *ranga-maṇḍapa*, or *mukha-maṇḍapa*. This is usually a highly elegant and elaborately ornate structure. The devotees prefer to be viewers rather than priests owing to several practical considerations such as lack of the knowledge of the worship rituals, lack of inclination, lack of time, difficulties of accommodation and so on. But they are the true worshippers, and the priest only officiates on their behalf.

The public character of worship in the temple is emphasized by the numerous processions and festivals involving the participation directly of the whole community. The 'āgamas' prescribe a large number of festivals which are to be conducted in the temple for the benefit of the people residing in that locality, for the welfare of the state in which the temple is situated, and for the good of the entire mankind. At the end of each festival, a formal blessing is invariably invoked on the community, the administration and humanity. The most important among these festivals is the 'rathotsava' or the 'car-festival', when the deity, normally worshipped within the temple, is taken out and made to go round the town, so that all the people (even those who are

otherwise disabled) have an opportunity of viewing and worshipping.

Such festivals are, for obvious reasons, excluded from household worship. The images worshipped are never taken out of the shrine-room, nor displayed to visitors. And the occasions for festivals in a household are much fewer than in a temple. Free and sumptuous feeding of all the participating devotees is a necessary feature of a temple festival, and to facilitate this the more important temples will have adequate financial resources. Such practices are obviously impossible in a household. Thus, the family members are the only participants in household worship, even when a festival is being celebrated.

The temple, even the modest one, is basically an organization. It is structurally designed to accommodate large or small gatherings of devotees on occasions, and also to house the images, vessels, vehicles, clothes, adornments and other material required for festivals and processions. Functionally it involves the services of several people. Besides the priest or priests, a temple of some means would have assistants for the priest, staff to clean the premises, personnel for looking after several details of a festival, guards and watchmen. Occasional, voluntary and free service of devotees is also availed of. Thus, a temple is a social and economic organization, apart from being a religious institution.

The worship in a temple is, therefore, multi-dimensional. It is not so much spiritual as religious; and religious phenomena are a complex of social, economic, recreational and educational processes. A temple in its intent comprehends all these aspects. Activities in the temple, especially during festivals, represent a mosaic of the individual's life within the community. The history of the celebrated temples (like the one at Tirumalai, or the one in Chidambaram, or the one in Puri-Jagannāth) illustrates how important the temple is in the evolution of the ethos of populations through dynastic successions. The interest shown by kings, chieftains, officers and the wealthy folk in the culture of temples has always been remarkable, and records suggest that the interest was

not always religious, much less spiritual.

Another particular also merits mention in this context. The priests officiating in the temple tend to form a class of their own, quite distinct from others belonging to the priestly profession such as the *purohīts* (or those who officiate in special religious events like the marriage, investiture, funerary rites, obsequies, sacramental rituals and so on), *vaidiks* (or those who visit households and assist in the worship rituals daily or occasionally), and *paṇḍits* (or learned brahmins who teach scriptural texts, or give public discourses on religious subjects). The temple-priests usually belong to the priestly families who have served in the temple for generations. They

have their own especial initiations (*dīkshā*), and their training involves an acquaintance with the 'āgamas' of particular sectarian persuasions. It is this that qualifies them to conduct worship in temples, for the other priestly brahmins do not undergo the special initiation, nor acquire a knowledge of the 'āgamas'.

In fact, the more learned and conservative among brahmins consider worship in a temple not suitable for a truly religious person who is evolved. For one thing, idolatry itself is the lowest form of worship, prescribed in the texts only for a person of ordinary equipment and inclination. For another, carrying on worship in public smacks of exhibitionism; the display of religious fervour in public is denounced in

the scriptures as vulgar. For still another, worship which involves remuneration or recompense is in reality a business transaction, and fails to bring about spiritual benefits. For yet another, all acts of worship can only be personal; scriptures do not commend collective worship.

Thus there is a prejudice among the orthodox against temple-priests, in fact against all professional priests. Manu denounces even a learned brahmin who teaches sacred texts and gets payed for it as a 'hireling' (*bhṛtakādhyāpaka*). This prejudice has resulted in relatively well-defined, closed, endogamous, and distinct classes of temple-priests of Śaiva, Vaishṇava and Śākta inclinations. They have been for generations custodians of the

scriptural lore concerning worship in temples. And they have been responsible for the temple-culture that has prevailed in the country since the early centuries of the Christian era.

The arguments of the orthodox against temples and worship of images in them are not unknown to the authors or compilers of the worship-manuals ('āgamas'). They concede that the best form of worship is contemplation on the invisible God as the inner-controller (*antaryāmin*) abiding in ones own heart ('munīnām hṛdi daivatam'); and they are aware that it is only people with little intelligence that see God in an icon ('pratimāsvalpa-buddhīnām'). This opinion is quoted in the *Smṛti* ascribed to the great Aparārka.

While this is so, the 'āgama' texts point out that it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for one to contemplate on the divinity without conceptualizing a form ('na cha rūpam vinā devo dhyātum kenāpi śakyate', *Vishṇu-saṃhitā*, 29, 51). It is in the very nature of mind to conjure up images. If the mind is forbidden to do this, it may lapse into drowsiness or get withered up. Mind has necessarily to be employed in worship, and therefore one finds an image of God a great advantage. Another text (*Parama-saṃhitā*, 3, 5-10) suggests that a human form for God is very helpful for the devotee to meditate on the divine attributes, to offer prayers, and to approach with love and devotion.

It is therefore that the temples contain images of God in human

form excepting the Śiva shrines where the image in the sanctum is a *lingam* (but the processional images even there will be in human form). It was usual in the medieval times for pious kings and chieftains to build temples, and the underlying idea was that God was the overlord even of the kings. If the king ruled over a region or territory, God rules over the entire world, nay over all the words that be. The God in the temple reminded the devotee of the king in his palace. The old Sanskrit expression for the temple, 'prāsāda', means also a palace.

Thus all honour that was due to an earthly king was considered due on a more magnificent scale to the God, who is the king of kings and before whom even the kings

bow their heads. All earthly kings derive their glory from Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa who is addressed as the 'overlord of the lords' (*mahārājādhirāja*) and who bestows wealth and power on mortals; and this Kubera attends on God. Thus, worship in a temple tends to incorporate customs and formalities of a typical royal court.

I

RITUAL REQUIREMENTS

Worship in a temple is a complex of ceremonies which are essentially religious in significance and of events which are essentially social in import. The former pertain to the rituals meant to preserve the spiritual power of the image in the sanctum and to promote the sanctity

of the shrine. The latter, however, are the means of attracting the devotees and of improving the image of the temple in the eyes of the people. The former may be described as 'rituals' (*karmārchā*), while the latter are the 'festivals' (*utsava*).

There will be procedures to be carried out, inside the sanctum or outside it, every day by the priests at the appointed hours in complete or partial seclusion. They are not meant for public view, nor do they involve participation by the lay devotees. These activities, being in the nature of rites, must necessarily be carried out, and in precisely the manner prescribed in the manuals. The 'āgama' texts contain the prescriptions in minute detail, and

a thorough acquaintance with these prescriptions is one of the major qualifications for a priest. And these are activities which only a priest can perform, by virtue of the initiation that he would have received.

These activities include the preparations for the day's worship, like cleaning the enclosure, cleaning of the vessels for use in worship, removal of the old flowers from the image in the sanctum, collection of fresh water for the day's rituals, gathering of flowers for decorating the image and trimming the oil-lamps in and around the sanctum. These are not necessarily carried out by the priest himself, unless he has no assistants or the temple has no provision for attenders (*parichāraka*). They are not rites proper, and so

do not require initiation. But in temples where the rule of *cousom* is old and strong, no one other than the qualified priest is allowed to enter the sanctum or touch the image, and therefore much of these preparatory services falls to his lot.

Water for use inside the sanctum has to be ritualistically pure, and can be collected only by the priest when he is ready for the day's service. Flowers, fruits and other materials required for daily worship may be brought by others, but they need to be sanctified before being taken inside the sanctum. It is only the priest that can so sanctify them. He does it by sprinkling water on them, and this water must have been previously sanctified by him, having been collected by himself.

Scriptural texts insist that water for use in worship must be collected from a running stream, a spring, a natural lake or a pond, or a well exposed to sunlight and fresh air. It was customary in the olden days to select the site for building a temple in close proximity to a natural and perennial source of water. It is usual to find in old temples a natural or artificial pond, called 'pushkariṇī', which will not only provide water for various services in the temple but will facilitate the festival called 'jala-keli') or 'nīr-āṭṭam' in Tamil) or 'teppotsava'.

The use of water in a temple is manifold and much. And water for rituals needs to be freshly collected every morning. Generally, the use of water with reference to

the image in the sanctum is four-fold : (1) water offered to the image for washing the feet (*pādyā*); (2) water offered for sipping or rinsing the mouth (*āchamana*); (3) water offered as oblation (*arghya*); and (4) water for bathing the image (*snāna*). Scriptural texts insist that water used for different functions must be differently got up. The water for washing the feet is mixed with four substances, viz., khus khus (*uśīra*), sandal-wood pieces (*chandana*), blades of *durvā*-grass and white-mustard (*siddha*). Water for sipping is mixed with six articles, viz., cardamom (*elā*), cloves (*lavanga*), camphor (*karpūra*), the fruit called *jambū*, jasmine (*jāti*) and the fruit called *priyangu*. Water for oblation must have eight substances put in it : gingelly (*tila*), rice (*vrīhi*), tips

of the *kuśa*-grass, milk, wheat, winnowed grains (*taṇḍula*), mustard (*sarshapa*), and water from the conch.

Water for ceremonial bath is elaborately prepared with numerous herbs, spices, flowers, grains and unguents. The bath is also given by a herbal decoction (*kashāya*) made by the barks of seven trees : *palāśa*, *udumbara*, *aśvattha*, *madhūka*, *plaksha*, *pāṭala* and *jambū*. Water from the tender cocoanut (*nālikera*) is also employed. A preparation known as 'pañchāmṛta', consisting of an amalgum of fruits like plantain and mangoes mixed with five substances (milk, curds, clarified butter, honey and sugar), is used for administering a bath on festive occasions.

Purificatory bath is conducted with the mixture of five products of cow (*pañchagavya*) : clarified butter (*ghṛta*, representing Rudra, and regarded as most adorable), curds (*dadhi*, representing Soma and productive of progeny), milk (*kshīra*, representing Śukra, and helpful in eliminating enemies), cow's urine (*go-mūtra*, representing Naṭa and productive of prosperity) and cow's refuse (*go-maya*, representing Arka or Sun, and beneficial in warding off diseases). This bath is given on astrologically significant days (like *ayana*, *vishuva*), or during solar or lunar eclipse, or during any auspicious occasion. There is a standard method of preparing this concoction: the cow's refuse is first mixed with cow's urine, and then this is put in clarified butter,

which in turn is mixed with curds, and finally the whole is put into milk.

It is usual in the temples to keep five large vessels to contain water for the above mentioned purposes, arranged on a large circular plate made of gold, silver or copper, standing on a tripod. The water for oblation (*arghya*) is placed on the South-East corner, the water for washing the feet (*pādya*) on the South-West, the water for sipping (*āchamanīya*) on the North-West, and the water for bath (*snānīya*) on the North-East. In the centre is kept the vessel containing water for general purposes (*sarvārtha-toya*). This will contain only a few *tulasī* leaves, some flowers, gingelly seeds and sandal paste.

The tripod (wooden) on which these vessels are kept, is placed in front of the image in the sanctum, close to where the priest sits and offers worship. There are also prescriptions about the seat and posture used by the priest while worshipping and what direction he should face while sitting. An wooden plank (*dārvāsana*) is said to be the best seat, for it is conducive to prosperity. Sitting on a piece of cloth spread on the floor is health-giving; woollen blanket used as a seat removes sorrow; and sitting on the deer-skin facilitates the obtainment of wisdom (*Amśu-maty-āgama*). According to *Kāraṇāgama* the best posture for a worshipper is to squat so that the knees and the tips of the feet are close together, and to focus the vision slightly on the tip

of the nose. This is known as *ruchirāsana*, described as 'beneficial in all worship' ('sarva-pūjā-hita').

Among the other articles necessary for worship, conch (*śamkha*), bell (*ghaṇṭā*) and utensils for waving lights before the image (*ārati* or *āratrikā*) are important. The conch is used in bathing the image, and for sanctifying the articles of worship as well as the worshipper himself. Legends describe that the ancestral conch emerged from the ocean of milk when it was churned by the gods and demons for the sake of ambrosia, and that it was adored by all the gods and received by the hand of Viṣṇu. Called 'Pāñcha-janya', it is said to be a divinity in its own right. Sun and Moon are said to reside in it;

Varuṇa, the god of waters, is said to abide in the middle portion; Prajāpati, the first born and the progenitor of all beings in its tail portion; and the twin river-goddesses Gangā and Sarasvatī in its front portion.

Vishṇu himself is said to be represented in conch. Conches are called in Sanskrit 'śamkha', which expressions signifies elimination of all misfortune ('śāmyati aśubham asmād iti'). Hence they are auspicious. Conches are blown on festive occasions, and no ritual can dispense with it. Conches occur in many sizes and shapes and are classified into many types. There are 'male' conches (having the tail-portion and the head-portion equal), 'female' conches (with the head-

portion thick), and 'hermaphrodite' conches (with the tail-portion thick). They are also grouped into brahmin, kshatriya, vaiśya and śūdra varieties. But the most significant is the grouping into 'left-inclining' (*vāmāvarta*) and the 'right-inclining' (*dakṣiṇāvarta*). The latter are regarded as very valuable and sacred. The 'superior' conches are said to be got from the river Tāmraparṇī, while the 'ordinary' ones from the river Gangā, and the 'inferior' ones from the river Narmadā. Conches are held so sacred that they are never placed on the floor, but always on a special stand meant for it. The conch is worshipped before the worship for the image begins, and also after the worship is over.

The bell (*ghaṇṭā*) is an other indispensable article in ritualistic worship. It is sounded even before the actual worship commences, in order to invite the gods to assemble and to drive away the evil forces. The sound from a good bell is uninterrupted, reverberating, deep and sonorous. There are bells specially made which will produce the long strains of the sound 'Om'. The ringing of the bell accompanies several worship-sequences, such as waving of the light (*ārati*), administering the ceremonial bath (*snāna* or *abhisheka*), and the offering of food (*naivedya*). The body of the bell is said to represent the divinity of time, viz., Ananta, and the 'tongue' the goddess of speech, Sarasvati; the handle signifies the vital principle (*prāṇa-*

śakti) in the form of Hanumān, Garuḍa, Nandi or Chakra. The bell without a handle in one of these forms is forbidden to be used in rituals, as it would bring about misfortune.

Waving of light before the image is a ritual known as 'dīpa', 'nīrājana', 'ārati' or 'ārātrika'. It is done towards the close of the worship sequences. For this purpose either camphor (*karpūra*) is used or a set of three, five or seven cotton wicks dipped in clarified butter (ghee) or in oil. The worshipper who waves the light during worship as also the devotee who witnesses this procedure will be said to conquer the dark worlds (viz., ignorance) and burn up all evil done in this life. Even if the ritual of

worship has been deficient owing to some lapse concerning the *mantras* used or some sequence in the procedure, it is said to be made good by the waving of lights (*Skānda-purāṇa*). The waving of the light is accompanied by the ringing of the bell (*ghaṇṭā*), blowing of the conch (*śankha*), or beating of a flat metallic instrument known as 'jaya-ghaṇṭā'. Hymns of praise are also recited while this is done.

This ritual tends to assume considerable importance, as it is always done before the gathering of devotees. It is considered meritorious for the lay folk to participate in this ritual sequence. And therefore the ritual is elaborately gone through. Several rounds of waving the lights are resorted to. And different kinds

of implements made in silver or bell-metal are used for this purpose, in order to enhance the effect and make the occasion very impressive. Among such implements are those that are shaped like a water-pot (*kumbha*), a tortoise (*kūrma*), a serpent with seven hoods (*nāga*), or a tower with the wick-containers arranged in a tapering manner (*gopura*). Commonly, however, a large round plate is used for the purpose; sometimes a small plate with a long and ornamental handle is used.

Flowers constitute an important article of worship. The image in the sanctum is decorated with garlands of flowers, and flowers (unstrewn) are required for several sequences in the worship. The texts contain

prescriptions about the flowers that may be used in rituals. In general, flowers with strong odour or without fragrance at all; the flowers that are still unblossomed or have become old, flowers that are bitten by insects or otherwise mutilated, and flowers that have been kept unused for a day are avoided. Flowers grown in a garden (*ārāma*) are considered the best; flowers collected from a forest (*vana*) rank next, and flowers bought (*vikrīta*) are regarded as inferior.

Flowers are classified with regard to their colour, fragrance, shape and origin. A three-fold classification is mentioned in the texts : (1) the '*śāttvika*' (or the 'superior') variety includes flowers like *śvetārka* (white calotropis), *nandyāvarta*, *droṇa* (*Leucas linifolia*),

śveta-padma (white lotus), *jāti* (jasmine), *mandāra* (coral tree, Erythrine Indica), *mālati* (*Jasminum Grandiflorum*), *punnāga* (*Rottleria Tinctoria*), *kurava*, *śata-patrikā* (*Anethum sowa*, a kind of rose) etc.; the '*rājasa*' (or middling) variety consists of flowers like *bṛhatī* (*solanum*), *dhattūra* (white thorn-apple, *Datura alba*), *raktotpala* (red lotus), *palāśa* (*Butea frondosa*), *pāṭala* (trumpet flowers) etc.; the '*tāmasa*' (or 'inferior') variety includes flowers that must not be used in daily rituals (*varjita*), like the blossom of the cotton plant (*kārpāsa*), *Pandanua odoratissimus* (*ketakī*), *Saccharum spontaneum* (*kāśa*, a variety of grass), china rose (*japā*), a variety of lotus (*śrī-parṇī*, *Gmelina Aroborea*), *Terminalia Bellerica* (*vibhītaka*) and *Pentapetes*

Phoenicea (*bandhūka*). The last mentioned variety, while forbidden in the daily rituals, may however be used on festive occasions, as for instance in decorating the image that is carried about in procession. Along with flowers, some leaves are also used in worship, like the *tulasī* (basil), the *bilva* (bel) and the *dūrvā* grass.

According to *Suprabhedāgama*, in decorating an image for worship, one part must be covered with flowers, one part with cotton or silk apparel, two parts with jewels and other ornaments, and one part must be left clear for worship (*pūjābhāga*). It is usual for colourful garlands to be hung round the neck of the deity, reaching the ankles. Unstrewn flowers are placed at the feet of the

deity, the ritual being called 'pushpanyāsa'.

Aromatic incense is also burnt during worship. It is usually a preparation of the exudation of the tree known as Amyris Agallochum (*guggula*) mixed with clarified butter. The best quality of it, however, is said to contain one part of *agaru* (Agallochum), two parts of *niryāsa* (fragrant gum resin), and three parts of *chandana* (sandal paste), all well kneaded with camphor (*karpūra*) and honey (*madhu*). Offering incense precedes the waving of light, and hence the two offerings are often together called 'dhūpa-dīpa', before the food-offerings (*naivedya*) are made.

Different kinds of seats (*āsana*) for the image are prescribed to be

employed in different sequences of the ritual. Usually five are employed: an octogonal seat called *yogāsana* for inviting the deity for worship (*āvāhana*), a square seat called *simhāsana* for giving bath (*snāna*), a circular seat called *mahāpadma* for actual worship (*archanā*), an hexagonal seat called *vimalā* for offering food (*naivedya* or *bhojana*), and a triangular seat called *anantāsana* for relaxation or recreation (*vinoda*). Details of the pentad (*pañchāsana*) are given in texts like *Chandra-jñānāgama* and *Suprabhedāgama*. The former work also provides the information about the symbolic significance of the five seats: the five *āsanas* represent the five primary elements, fire (*agni*), water (*āpah*), air (*vāyu*), *ākāśa*, and earth (*pr̥thivī*), respectively.

After food is offered to the deity (*naivedya*), it is customary to present *tāmbūla* consisting of some betel leaves (*nāga-vallī-dala*), areca-nut (*pūgī-phala*), mixed with some camphor-powder (*karpūra*) and spices for aroma and fragrance. Even when no prepared food (consisting of the four varieties of food, viz., *bhakshya*, *bhojya*, *choshya* and *pāniya*) is available for offering, the *tāmbūla* is offered along with a coconut and some fruits (plantains, mango etc.). This would be an adequate substitute for the food-offering (*naivedya*).

In temples where the Vedic influence prevails, fire-oblations (*havis*) are offered daily in the morning or at noon. It is usual to have a separate enclosure for this

ritual known as *homa* or *agni-kārya*. This enclosure may contain a formal platform (*vedī* or *sthaṇḍila*) or a fire-pit (*homa-kunḍa*), or may have a mobile metallic fire-container (*chullā*). The temple may also have a supply of all the implements (like the *sruva* and *sruk*) that are required for the ritual, as well as the vessels to contain the articles for oblation (*āhuti-dravya*). However, priests tend to content themselves with carrying out the most essential details of the ritual, which has now become incidental and routine, if indeed it is performed at all. It must be borne in mind that this ritual bears no natural, nor necessary, relevance to the worship rituals that are conducted in a temple.

After food is ceremonially offered to the main image in the

sanctum, portions of food are laid on the altar (*balipīṭha*) and on several spots around the sanctum, in order to propitiate the attendant-divinities (*parivāra-devatā*). Food is also offered to the 'door-keepers' (*dvāra-pāla*). In temples which are affluent, this usually assumes the character of a procession, where some priests along with the bali-icon (*bali-bera*, a representative of the main image in the sanctum) go about the temple premises, to the accompaniment of music (*nāgasvaram*, pipe and drums) and ringing of the bells.

II

DAILY RITUAL

The word *pūjā* (meaning 'worship') signifies the fulfilment of the prescribed rituals ('pūryante

sarva-karmāṇī) and the obtainment of the knowledge of the divine ('jāyate jñānam ātmani') (*Kāraṇāgama*). Thus the rituals constitute the necessary part of worship. This aspect is emphasized in words synonymous with 'pūjā', viz. *saparyā*, *archā*, *varivasyā*, *paricharyā*, and *upāsanā* (*Amara-kosha*, 2,7,34). The several rituals that constitute the worship are called 'upachāras' or services.

There are as many as sixty-four 'upachāras' listed in texts like *Tantra-sāra* and *Siddha-yāmala*. But in actual practice not more than eighteen are recognized. And it is usual to offer only sixteen upachāras; hence the popular expression 'shoḍashopachāra-pūjā'. They are fashioned after the details of the customary reverence shown to an

honoured guest. They are : (1) seating (*āsana*), (2) welcoming (*svāgata*), (3) offering water to wash the feet (*pādya*), (4) offering water to wash the hands (*arghya*), (5) offering water to sip and rinse the mouth (*āchamana*), (6) providing a bath (*snāna*), (7) offering fresh clothes and decorations (*vasana-bhūshaṇa*), (8) offering a fresh sacred thread (*yajñopavīta*), (9) offering aromatic substances like sandal paste (*gandha*), (10) offering flowers (*pushpa*), (11) burning incense (*dhūpa*), (12) waving lights (*dīpa*), (13) offering four kinds of food (*naivedya*), (14) offering *tāmbūla* (betel leaves, areca nut, camphor and spices), (15) prostrations (*namaskāra*), along with circumambulations (*pradakshina*) and (16) send-off (*visarjana*).

If the worship has to be brief, only five *upachāras* are gone through (*pañchopachāra*) : (1) inviting (*āvāhana*), (2) seating (*sthāpanā*), (3) establishing communion (*sannidhīkaraṇa*), (4) worship (*pūjana*), including offering water for the feet (*pādya*), offering sandal paste (*gandha*), offering flowers (*pushpa*), burning incense (*dhūpa*), waving lights (*dīpa*) and offering food (*naivedya*), and (5) send-off (*visarjana*). This is a normal routine in house-hold worship which is also followed in the temples with moderate means.

In affluent temples, however, many other details are added like offering of ornaments (*ābharāṇa*), decorations (*alankāra*), holding a mirror (*darpaṇa*), applying unguents

(*anulepana*), fanning with a fly-whisk (*chāmara-vyajana*), presenting dance and music (*nartana*, *gīta-vādyā*), reciting laudatory verses (*stuti* or *stotra*), presenting fire-oblations (*homa*), and providing bed (*śayana*).

These do not include the rituals that the priest has to perform preparatory to worship. The day for the priest commences with a bath after the morning ablutions. It must be noted that the bath itself is a ritual for the priest, for there are prescriptions about the water to be used (well-water or water from the running stream is preferred), the place where the bath is to be had (open), the hymns that must be recited during the bath (*snāna-mantra*), and the clothes that must be worn after the bath (*vastra*). The

bath is followed by the ritual of internal purification by means of sipping sanctified water (*āchamana*), regulating the breathing process for the specified duration (*prāṇāyāma*), and investing the various parts of his body with divine presence (*anga-nyāsa*, *kara-nyāsa*). Then he performs the customary ritual of *sandhyā-vandana*, which is indispensable for the twice-born, and proceeds with the *āhnika* or the day's rituals which are incumbent on him to perform. Then he finishes his household worship (the worship of his tutelary deities in accordance with his family-custom and according to the initiation that he has received), before he goes to the temple for conducting worship there.

Opening of the temple-door for the day is also a ritual. Custom

requires that the priest at dawn carries the keys of the temple on his head, goes round the temple thrice, and prostrates before the main door of the temple. It is only then that he reverentially unlocks the door and enters the sacred precincts, along with the attendants. He again circumambulates the main shrine (or the sanctum) thrice, and looks at the tower over the sanctum (*vimāna*), before he opens the sanctum. He bows to the deity and offers a short prayer. In temples where the entrance of the sanctum is flanked by 'door-guardians' (*dvāra-pāla*), they receive the first homage, even before the doors of the sanctum are opened.

The priest, or his attendant, trims the wicks of the oil lamps, and provides fresh oil for the lamps. The

precincts of the temple as well as the vessels used for worship are cleaned, water for the rituals is collected, flowers and other articles required for worship are gathered. The sanctum has to be cleaned by the priest himself, for texts forbid a lay person from entering the sanctum. He also attends to the lamps, which have been left burning all through the night in the immediate vicinity of the deity. Then he proceeds to formally 'wake up' the deity to receive the day's worship. This is technically known as 'prabodhana'. This completes the series of preparatory rituals and signifies preparing (or getting ready) the deity for the sequences of the ritual worship (18, 16 Or 5).

Worship in the temple is usually conducted three times in the

course of twenty-four hours: morning (*prātaḥ*), noon (*mādhyaḍina*) and evening (*sāyan*). This is known as 'trikāla-pūja'. This is regarded as the minimum number of times beneficial worship may be conducted; for worship conducted twice only is inadequate, and once only altogether ineffective. But the number may be increased, and some texts provide worship as many as twelve times.

Most of the texts, however, prescribe six times of worship as most beneficial. Known as 'ṣaṭ-kāla pūja', this worship involves worship at early dawn (*pratyūsha*, about 5 a.m.), early morning (*kāla-sandhi*, about 6 a.m.), pre-noon (*upa-sandhi*, about 9 a.m.), noon (*madhyāhna*, 12 noon), evening (*sāyankāla*, 6

p.m.), and late night (*ardha-yāma* 10 p.m.). Sometimes an early-night worship (known as *pradosha-puja*, at about 8 a.m.) also is conducted.

The Vaikhānasa texts provide for worship six times, whereas the Śaiva texts insist on the 'pradosha-pūjā' as the sixth, before the 'ardha-yāma pūjā', is conducted. The Pāñcha-rātra texts suggest even 12 times, if possible. However, some texts, which are more realistic, prescribe six times as most desirable, but do not preclude three times, two times or even once from the benefit.

Worship at different times have different benefits, according to the texts. Worship early in the morning (*pratyūsha*, or *arunodaya*) is said to

increase the cattle-wealth and progeny in the community; in the morning (*prabhāta* or *prātaḥ*) to promote religious fervour among the people; at noon, to secure prosperity of the kingdom; during afternoon, to eliminate enemies and destroy demonic forces; in the evening, to increase wealth and production of grains, and late in the night, to help spiritual welfare of the people.

The ritual of daily worship consists of five main ingredients : (1) The first is inviting the represented divinity to partake in the ritual (*āvāhana*). (2) The second is invoking life-force (*sthāpana*) in the representation of the divinity so that the image worshipped is for the time being the divinity itself. This is necessary in household worship,

but is not relevant in temples, where the images installed according to āgamic prescriptions are always 'alive' and fit for worship without formal 'infusion of life-force' (*prāṇa-pratishṭhā*). However, the ritual detail of *sthāpanā* involves seating (*āsana*) and other formalities of preparing the deity for the day's worship.

This is followed by (3) getting the deity in proper communion with the worshipper (*sannidhī-karaṇa*), so that the worship conducted becomes effective. The worship proper, (4) *pūjā* or *archanā*, is the main stage, which will be described in some detail presently. The final aspect of worship is (5) the formal bidding farewell to the deity (*visarjana*, literally 'dismissing'), which marks the completion of the ritual.

While the above five details are of universal validity and are in actual practice, customs and sectarian traditions have brought about variations in other particulars which constitute the full ritual. There are variant hymns used and different procedures adopted, according to Vaikhāṣana, Pāñcharātra, Śākta, and Śaiva prescriptions. But the five sequences mentioned above are common to all these traditions, and there is in them not much of variation in hymns or in procedures. Thus there is a fair degree of uniformity in the worship, despite differences in the āgama followed. What follows is the ritual sequence, according to the Vaikhāṣana tradition, as an illustration.

The priest sits to the right of the image and rings the bell, in order

to invite the gods for worship and to scare away the evil spirits. he utters a hymn to this purport. Then he cleanses the earth (*bhū-śuddhi*), purifies the elements, and recites the resolve to worship, known as 'sankalpa'. He invokes blessings on all the residents of the village, as he is conducting the worship as a representative of all of them.

The priest then removes the old flowers from the icon, starting from the East and proceeding in a clockwise fashion to North-east, uttering a hymn which seeks to remove diseases and throw away the evil forces. He then obtains permission from the deity to proceed with the worship ritual, and cleans the place of worship with water and lays flowers at the feet of the deity

(*nirmālya-śodhana* and *pushpa-nyāsa*).

This is followed by the transformation and accommodation of all the elements that constitute both the worshipper's own body and the world around (*bhūta-samhāra-nyāsa*). Then comes the ritual of bringing into being the elements that help the worship ritual (*bhūta-sṛisṭi-nyāsa*), preparatory to the infusion of life-force into the icons that are meant to be worshipped as representatives of the Highest Spirit. This latter ritual sequence, known as 'prāṇa-pratishṭhā' is an important one, as it establishes the necessary communion between the worshipper and the deity worshipped.

The ritual of investing the physical icon with life, so as to make

it 'alive' during worship is a highly symbolic procedure wherein the worshipper draws out (of course symbolically) the vital currents from his own 'heart' and infuses them into the icon before him (*bimba*), and at the same time he draws the presence of the Highest Spirit (*parāmatmā*) into his own individual being (*jīvātmā*). In the Vaikhānasa tradition, however, the temple ritual is meant to draw the ever-present 'life' in the main, immoveable stone image (*dhruva-bera*) and invest it in the small moveable, metallic image that is used in worship (*chala-bera*). The main image will not thereby be deprived of any of its own life, and the situation is likened to a lamp lighting other lamps, and burning as bright as ever. The 'life' present in the main image is assured to it at

the moment of consecration and does not need to be renewed, whereas the moveable images need to be invested with 'life' every time the worship is conducted viz., daily.

After this ceremony, the worshipper proceeds to prepare himself for the worship, by securing competence to worship (*bhagavad-ārāadhanādhikāra-yogyatā-siddhi*) through the ritual of 'brahma-nyāsa' (involving the sequences of invoking divine presence in his heart, in his head, and in the tufts of his hair, and protecting himself from disturbing factors by means of a visualized armour, called *kavacha* and *astra*).

Having thus prepared himself, he sanctifies the water that is kept ready for the worship in five vessels.

When the water is duly purified, the other articles of worship as well as the platform on which the worship is conducted are purified by sprinkling some of this water on them. The worshipper then conjures up the five forms of Viṣṇu (Satya, Puruṣa, Achyuta, Aniruddha and Viṣṇu, and offers flowers at the feet of the main image, which is now connected with the metallic icon on the platform by means of a silken or golden cord *sambandha-sūtra*).

He then contemplates on the resplendent form of the deity he is worshipping (*dhyāna*), and removes the icon from its position on the platform (*vedi*) to a separate seat for bathing (*snānāsana*), while reciting an appropriate hymn. Commencing with the feet (which

are reverentially washed), a bath with clean water is given to the icon to the accompaniment of a recital of sacred hymns like 'Puruṣa-sūkta'. Before the administration of the bath, the icon is formally welcomed (*svāgatam*), offered water to wash the feet (*pādya*), offered water to wash the hands (*arghya*), offered water to sip (*āchamāna*), offered water to clean the teeth (*danta-dhāvana*), offered water to wash the tongue (*jihvā-śodhana*) and finally offered water once again to sip and rinse the mouth (*āchamanīya*).

It is customary to use water sprinkled with sweet milk for the second round of bathing, after which the icon is rubbed with turmeric, and again washed with clean water

(*śuddhodaka*). The bath being over, the icon is dried with a piece of cloth (*plota*) while a hymn is being recited, and then is returned to its former position on the platform. Sometimes, after the regular bath, a shower-bath with a silver plate containing a thousand holes (*sahasra-dhāra*) is given, before being shifted to the platform. The ritual bath is known as *snāna*, or *abhisheka* or *mārjana*. It is usual to employ a conch for giving bath with clean water (*śuddhodaka*).

When the icon is returned to the platform, the formal worship (*pūjā*) begins by offering the deity garments (*vastra* and *uttarīya*), ornaments (*ābharāṇa*), sacred thread (*upavīta*) and flowers (*pushpa*). The sequence constitutes the main

worship, when flowers, sandal paste and consecrated rich (*gandhākshata*), incense (*dhūpa*), light (*dīpa*), food (*naivedya*) and *tāmbūla* are ceremonially offered. It is during this sequence that one hundred and eight names (*ashṭottaraśata*) or one thousand names (*sahasra-nāma*) of the deity are recited, offering a flower or *tulasī* leaves or consecrated rice while reciting each name.

The different offerings during worship are said to have different benefits : water for the hands (*arghya*) is to please the gods ('deva-priyārtha'), sandal-paste (*gandha*) is the favourite article of Brahmā, flowers (*pushpa*) favour prosperity ('vṛddhi-prada'), incense (*dhūpa*) is dear to the god of fire (*vaiśvānara-priya*'), waving lights (*ārātri*) is

conducive to victory ('jaya-prada') and food offering (*naivedya* or *havis*) is for abundance ('samṛddhi').

On occasions a variant bath known as 'pañchāmṛta-snāna' is administered. After the first round of bath in water a bath in milk (*dugdha*) is given, followed by a bath in curds (*dadhi*), a bath in ghee (*ghṛta*), a bath in honey (*madhu*), a bath in sugar (*śarkarā*), and a bath in cocoanut water (*nārikela-jala* or *phalodaka*) are given in order, reciting an appropriate Vedic hymn for each article. Finally, bath in clean water (*śuddhodaka-snāna*) is administered. Before the five articles are used, five forms of the divinity are invoked in them : Vāmana in curds, Viṣṇu in ghee (clarified butter), Madhusūdana in honey,

Achyuta in sugar and Govinda in milk. The vessels containing the five articles are placed before the deity in a definite order: curds to the East, ghee to the South, honey to the West, sugar to the North, and milk in the centre. And before the offering is made, the priest sanctifies the articles with a symbolic gesture known as 'dhenu-mudrā'.

It may be noted that the vessels containing water for different ritual sequences are also placed in a prescribed manner: the vessel containing water for *arghya* is placed to the North-West, the vessel, with water for *pādya* to the South-West, the vessel for *āchamanīya* to the North-East, and the vessel containing water to be used for giving the bath (*snāna*) to the South-East. In the

centre is placed the vessel containing what is known as 'madhu-parka' (literally, 'a mixture of honey', but containing curds, milk, ghee, honey and sugar). The last is the offering usually made to an honoured guest, and in worship it is offered immediately before the bath is given.

Towards the end of the sequence of worship comes the final waving of light (*nīrājana*), very elaborately done, following by hymnal offerings (*mantra-pushpa*), recital of laudatory verses (*stotra*), seeking pardon for the lapses (*kshamāpaṇa*), circumambulations (*pradakṣiṇa*) and prostrations (*namaskāra*).

On special occasions, the deity after normal worship is seated on

a throne and is treated like a king: an umbrella (*chhatra*) is held over the head, fly-whisks (*chāmara*) are waved, a mirror (*ādarśa*) is presented, and the deity is entertained by music (*gīta*, *vādyā*), dance (*nr̥tta*) and recitals from the Vedic literature, poetical works, purāṇic narratives, *kalpa-sūtras* and *smṛti*-texts.

III

FESTIVALS

The Samskrit word for festival is 'utsava'. Derived from the root 'sū' (meaning 'generating', 'producing'), and with the prefix 'ut' (meaning 'up', 'rising', 'excitement'), the word signifies an event that generates happiness or excitement ('utsūte harshaṃ'). Thus the lexicon

Amara-kosha gives 'kshaṇa' ('great moment'), 'uddharsha' ('excitement'), 'mahah' ('auspicious occasion') as synonyms of 'utsava'. The word also is taken to mean 'up-lifting' ('un-nati'), 'prosperity' (abhyudaya).

The āgama texts give other explanations. The *Uttara-kāraṇāgama* (4,1) takes 'ut' in the sense of wisdom ('jñānam') and 'sava' in the sense of what causes all benefit ('savah kalyāṇa-kāraṇam'). *Purushottama samhita* (32, 2) however, means by 'ut' what is excellent ('utkṛṣṭa-vachanah'), and by 'sava' sacrifice ('yajña'), *Nāradiya-samhitā* (18) and *Īśvara-samhitā* (10, 3) give yet another interpretation : 'ut' means 'obstacles', 'impediments',

('vighnāh') and 'sava' is 'throwing out' ('udgatāh'). Thus 'utsava' is an event calculated to eliminate impediments. Other texts (e.g. *Aniruddha-samhitā* 20, 1, *Pādma-samhitā* 2, 10) explain that 'sava' is misery, misfortune ('amangala') and 'ut' is the act of tiding across; 'utsava' enables us to cross over all sorrow.

Festivals constitute a necessary aspect of any religion. Besides the benefits which are purely religious, they make for group-feeling and participation and channelize the individual energies towards a common social concern. They are especially important in the Indian religions, both in households and in communities. Joint families and rural communities encouraged these

festivals for social, economic as well as spiritual purposes. The temple being essentially a collective institution and a centre of social interaction, it attaches significance to festivals, for festivals attract more crowds than the daily worship.

Temples have more festivals than households can possibly manage, and many of them are different from household festivals. Festivals in households are largely calendar events with astronomical significance (e.g. Yugādi, Sankrānti, Oṇam, Chittirai, Ādi, Diwali, Vasantha-pañchami, Śrāvaṇī, Vaiśākhi etc.), or in honour of a divinity (e.g. Rāma-navami, Kṛṣṇa-janmāshṭami, Mahā-śiva-rātri, Durgā-pūjā, Vara-lakshmī-vratam, Narasimha-jayanti, Nāga-pañchami,

Gaṇeśa, chaturthi, Skanda-shasṭhi etc.) or for participation in a community activity (e.g. Rakshā-bandhana, Dasarā, Vana-yātrā, Kāveri-mūla, Guru-pūrṇimā etc).

Special worship is offered in temples on all these occasions, but they do not exhaust the number of festivals conducted in temples. In fact, the house-hold festivals are not of much importance in temples, except when the divinity who is worshipped in a festival is also the main deity in the temple (e.g. Kṛṣṇa-janmāshṭami in a Kṛṣṇa temple, Maha-Śiva-rātri in a Śiva temple, Gaṇeśa-chauti in Gaṇeśa temple). Temples have their own festivals, which are meant to 'contribute to the around prosperity of the people as well as the nation'

(‘prajānām api rāshṭrasya sarvābhyudaya sādhakam’, *Purushottama-samhitā*, 23, 6), to ‘undo the evil effects of calamities, famine and terrible portents’ (‘durbhiksha-durnimittādi-ghoraṇām śāntidam’, *ibid*) and to ‘bring about welfare of the people by securing for them the four-fold values in life viz., virtue, wealth, pleasures and liberation’ (‘dharmārtha-kāma-mokshāṇām purushārtha-pradam śubham’, *ibid*. 7).

Festivals in temples are described in texts as greatly meritorious, as they achieve renewed sanctity for the deities worshipped (‘devānām api sarveshām pavitrīkaraṇāya cha’, *Īśvara-samhitā*, 11, 275), as they help people accomplish all their cherished objectives in life, enhance celebrity,

and increase prosperity and prolong life (‘āyushkaram yaśaskaram saubhāgya-vivardhanam....sarva-kāma-phala-pradam’, *Pūrva-kāraṇāgama*, 141), and as they assure success and victory for the kings (‘rājñām vijaya-vṛddhim’ *ibid*). *Pādma-samhitā* (10, 5) tells us that gods in olden days celebrated their victory when they defeated the demon Vṛtra, and that this was the origin of, and model for, festivals in the world of mortals. Another text (*Śrī-praśna*) informs us that Indra, when he defeated Vṛtra in the battle, celebrated the glory of the great God Vishṇu who in fact gave Indra the strength and guidance. All the festivals on earth are in memory of this festival which Indra and the other gods celebrated in the celestial realm.

Temple festivals are classified into three kinds : (1) *nitya* (routine, recurring, necessary), the annual festivals conducted according to the month and fortnight which are considered auspicious, (2) *naimittika* (occasional, 'nimitte sati kalpitah'), festivals conducted for pacification, in situations like earthquake, eclipse, fall of meteor, appearance of strange objects in the sky, damage to the tower of the temple by lightning, fire accidents in the temple premises, famine, floods, excessive rain, disturbance in the position of the main image in the sanctum, sight of a second sun, damage caused to the icons in the temple, death occurring within the enclosure of the temple, or defilement caused to the temple in any other way (*Īśvara-samhitā*, 10, 1-7; *Pārameśvara-*

samhitā 19, 5-7; *Purushottama-samhitā*, 23, 6; *Śrī-praśna*, 31, 9 etc); and festivals conducted when a grave calamity befalls the people of the locality, an epidemic, threat of war or illness of the king (*Aniruddha-samhitā*, 20, 2-9; *Pādma-sāṅcharyā*, 20 9-18); and (3) *kāmya* (to accomplish the cherished goals of the people), festivals conducted to commemorate the building of the temple or the installation of the main icon, or when desired by the people (*Nāradiya-samhitā*, 18, 6; *Īśvara-samhitā*, 10, 8; *Aniruddha-samhitā*, 20, 10; *Pārameśvara-samhitā*, 16, 7-8).

Of the three kinds of festivals mentioned above, the first is described as *sāttvika* or activities done in the spirit of an ordained

duty, with no desires attached to them, while the second is described as *rājasa*, or activities done to avert a disaster, repair some damage, or cleanse and purify. The third kind of festivals belongs to the *miśra* or mixed type. Some texts, however, describe the *nitya* festivals as 'sāttvika', *kāmya* as 'rājasa' and *naimittika* as 'tāmasa' (e.g. *Śrī-praśna*, 31, 16).

Festivals can be conducted only after the daily and customary rituals of worship (*nityārchanā*) are completed in the sanctum. Any festival is a special occurrence, and cannot take the place of daily worship, much less gain precedence over the latter. In fact, in temples where ancient customs continue to prevail, festivals are conducted quite

independently of the worship that goes on in the sanctum. In the temple on top of the Tirumalai hills in Andhra Pradesh, for instance, the procedure of worship within the sanctum remains altogether unaltered despite the large number of festivals that are conducted there. Not an extra flower is offered, not a single special item of food offering is allowed, not a fresh hymn is recited within the sanctum, even on festive occasions. All the details of the festival are to be found only outside the sanctum. The daily worship to the main deity follows strictly an old tradition, and brooks no departure even in the minutest detail.

That is why it is common to find in temples two varieties of icons : the immoveable main image in the

sanctum, which gets daily worship (*mūla-sthāna*, *dhruva-bera*) and the moveable icons (*chala-bera*) to which are conducted rituals connected with festivals (and hence called *utsava-bera*). In the Vaishṇava-shrines, it is common practice to have different icons for different sequences in the worship outside the sanctum (e.g. the *snapana-bera* to receive the daily bath, *bali-bera* to dole out the food-offerings to the subordinate divinities in the temple, *utsava-bera* to be carried about in processions on festive occasions, *koluvu-bera* to preside over the daily court held in the hall of the temple, etc.). The system of having five icons (including the main image in the sanctum) is known as 'pañcha-bera'. While the main image is in stone or wood, the

other images are metallic. However, the principal icons are only two : the immoveable image in the sanctum (*mūla-bera*) and the metallic image that is used for festivals (*utsava-bera*).

If the daily worship (*nityārchanā*) takes a few hours to perform, the festival will usually stretch for the whole day and part of the night, and there are festivals that go on for several days. Texts like *Raurava-kriyā* (18, 8-9) classify festivals according to the days they take to be completed (cf. also *Chandra-jnāna*, 21, *Ajitāgama* 27, 2-7, *Dīptāgama*, 83 and *Pūrvakāraṇāgama*, 141, 2-3). The festival that is over in a day is called 'śāmbhava' (acc. to the Śaivite āgama; 'brāhma' acc. to the

Vaishṇava texts); if the festival goes on for three days, it is 'maukta' (or Śaiva); if for five days, it is 'brāhma' (or 'Aindra'); if for seven days, it is 'ārsha' (in both Śaiva and Vaishṇava divisions); and if it is for nine days, it is 'Śākta' (or 'Vaishṇava'), (*Raurava-kriyā*, 18, 8-9 and *Īśvara-samhitā*, 13).

There are also festivals that stretch for twelve days, and they are called 'Saura' (acc. to *Dīptāgama* 83) or 'paitṛka' (acc. to *Pūrva-kāraṇāgama*, 141, 4-3). Festivals that go on for thirteen days are called 'Kaumāra', for fourteen days 'Sāvitrya', and for fifteen days 'Chāndra' (*Ajitāgama*, 27, 21-23). *Dīptāgama*, which recognizes all the nine types mentioned above, classifies the last three (from 13 to

15 days) as 'superior' (*uttama*), the middle three (from 7 to 12 days) 'midling in merit' (*madhyama*), and the first three (from 1 to 5 days) as 'inferior' (*kanyāsa*). However, the Vaishṇavite texts generally prohibit festivals that go beyond twelve days (e.g. *Hayaśīrsha-samhita*, 36,4), although there are texts which extend the limit to 21 days (e.g. *Nāradya-samhitā*, 18, 93).

Different benefits for festivals of different duration have also been mentioned in the texts. *Uttara-kāraṇāgama*, for instance, says that the nine-day festival brings about happiness (*saukhya*) to the people while the seven-day and five-day festivals bring about success (*viḥaya*), and the three-day, two-day and one-day festivals cause prosperity

(*ṛddhi*). According to *Īśvara-samhitā*, the one-day festival is beneficial to the upper castes, the three-day festival eliminates diseases, the five-day festival prevents famine, the seven-day festival increases the power of the people and the influence of the king, and the nine-day festival protects all people in all ways ('sarva-rakshārtham'). *Nārāyaṇa-samhitā* (44) mentions that one-day festivals please Brahma, three-day festivals Śiva, seven-day festivals Lakshmī and nine-day festivals Viṣṇu.

There is another classification of festivals suggested in *Kāraṇāgama*, 24, 424-5 which emphasizes the rituals involved rather than the days. Festivals, according to this text, are of four kinds: (1) 'sākalya'

('complete', involving all the rituals, with no exception); (2) 'pāvana' ('purifying', involving all the rituals except hoisting the ceremonial flag, *patākā*); (3) 'śānta' ('bringing about peace', involving fire-rituals or *homa* in the morning, food-offerings or *bali*, at noon, and festivities, *utsava*, in the evening); (4) 'māṅgalya' ('auspicious', involving whatever rituals are preferred by the donor, *yajamāna*).

Festivals are further classified according to how they begin *utsavārambha*). Texts like *Pārameśvara-samhitā* (16, 28-29) and *Nārādīya-samhitā* (18, 7-8) make a three-fold classification, in terms of the ritual marking the commencement of the festival, which is regarded as the 'chief ceremony'

(*mukhya-kalpa*) : (1) 'sprout-offering (*ankurārpaṇa*), which causes all happiness and prosperity ('sarva-sampat-samṛddhidam'); (2) 'beating the drum' (*bherī-tāḍana*), which delights the gods ('devānām priyāvaham'); and (3) 'hoisting the flag' (*dhvajārohaṇa*), which causes happiness for all creatures ('sarva-prāṇi-sukhāvaham'). The benefits mentioned above are according to *Pūrva-kāraṇāgama* (141, 3-4). According to *Pārameśvara-samhitā* (16, 30), however, the benefits of the three kinds of festivals are : causing liberation for all beings ('sarveshām mokshadam'), resulting in enjoyment of heaven ('svarga-bhoga-phala'), and causing welfare of the kingdom and the king ('rāja-rāshṭra-sukha'), respectively.

It is usual for one-day festivals to commence with the 'beating of the drum' *bherī-tāḍana*, which signifies invitation for the celestial beings to assemble and participate with the human beings in the festival. *Ajitāgama* (27, 23) precludes 'hoisting of the ritual banner or flag' (*dhvajārohaṇa*) from one-day, three-day and five-day festivals. For all other festivals, it is a necessary preparation. *Raurava-kriyāgama* (18) prescribes that festivals which are meant for pacification (*śāntika*) and nourishment (*paushtika*) should not have the flag-hoisting ceremony, while in festivals for victory (*jayada*) the flag-hoisting is optional, and in festivals for wealth (*dhanada*) and fulfilment of desires (*kāmada*) it is indispensable.

The day for the hoisting of the flag is to be determined in relation to the day on which the concluding ceremony known as *tīrtha-yātrā* or *avabhṛta-snāna* (the ceremonial bath of the icons as well as the devotees in a tank or river, marking the conclusion of the festival), as the latter is regarded as the most significant event in the festival. The day for this event is ascertained by consulting stellar positions and constellations. In fact, there is a classification of festivals in terms of this event. If the ceremonial bath takes place on the ninth day, it is a 'superior' (*sāttvika*) festival; if on the seventh day, it is of midling merit (*rājasa*) and if on the fifth day it is 'inferior' (*tāmasa*) (*Śrī-praśna* 31, 15). Thus the texts insist that the auspicious day for the 'tīrtha' is

first to be determined (*Purushottama-samhitā*, 23 'niśchitya tīrtha-divasam yāga-karma samārabhet' ; *Pūrva-kāraṇagama*, 141, 'tīrtham ādau viniśchitya').

The flag-hoisting for the festivals (excluding the one-day, three-day and five-day festivals is performed twenty-one days earlier to the day fixed for the 'ceremonial bath' (*tīrtha-yātrā*), according to *Nāradiya-samhitā* (18, 17). The flag or banner on which the figure of Indra, (the chieftain of the gods), of Garuḍa (the carrier of Viṣṇu), or of Vṛṣhabha (the vehicle of Śiva), or an emblem of a god is painted ritualistically and hoisted in front of the temple, to indicate that the festival has begun. Once the flag is hoisted, custom requires that no

domestic festivity or function (marriage etc.) can be held within the village until the flag is taken down after the ceremonial bath (*tīrtha-yātra*). Human celebrations are precluded during the period when celebrations are being conducted in honour of the deity (*Pādma-sancharyā*, 10, 42).

In a seven-day festival (called 'jayada', for it is said to ensure success and victory in all enterprises), the first day is devoted to the preparation and worship of the flag or banner, which is hoisted on the second day. The third day marks the 'sprout-offering' (*ankurārpaṇa*). Seeds of nine (or ten) kinds of grain (rice, gingelly, millet, tail-pepper, black-gram, mustard, bean called *mudga*, a legume called

śha, *Dolichos uniflorus* or *Kaulattha*) are sown in twelve earthen pots filled with mud ceremonially collected and placed on a specially sanctified *maṇḍala*, offerings are made to the spirits in the eight directions, invoking them to protect the sprouts. This ceremony is done during night, because moon is regarded as the lord of plants. The subsequent days are meant for fire-sacrifice (*yāga*), a ritual called 'chūrṇotsava', offering of oblations (*bali*) and the final ceremonial bath (*tīrtha*).

In case the festival is elaborate, it covers fifteen days, beginning with 'sprout offering' (*ankurārpaṇa*) on the first day and the following rituals on the remaining days : hoisting of the flag (*dhvajārohaṇa*), purifying

bath (*śuddha-snāna*) or the beating of the drum (*bheri-tāḍana* or *bherikā-ghosha*), fixing up of the icons and other details (*sthāpana*), fire-oblations (*homa*), offering of food to the attendant divinities (*bali-pradāna*), the ritual called 'chūrṇotsava', or the procession of the icon in a decorated car in all gait and splendour (*mahotsava* or *ratha-yātrā*), carrying of icons to the tank or river for ceremonial bath (*tīrtha-snāna*, or *avabhṛta*), the ritual called *pushpa-yāga*, offering of gifts and money to the officiating priests and all others who partook in the festival (*dakṣiṇā-sampradāna*), and finally taking down the ceremonial flag (*dhvajāvarohaṇa*), marking the conclusion of the festival (*Vishvakṣena-samhitā*, 27, 12-16).

The most important festival in a temple is known as 'brahmotsava', so called because the chief of the gods, Brahmā, himself is supposed to conduct this festival in honour of the presiding deity of the temple. It is usually very grand, spectacular, colourful and full of gaiety; it draws huge and enthusiastic crowds of devotees, and the village assumes a festive look. It is of considerable social, economic, and political significance, besides the religious import. The celebrity of a temple depends on how grand and popular its 'brahmotsava' is.

Texts speak of five varieties of *brahmotsava* : 1) 'brāhma', which is only a day's affair, meant to increase the spiritual power of the temple (*brahma-tejo-vṛddhi*); (2)

'śaiva', which goes on for three days and is meant to remove all obstacles to the people (*vighna-nāśana*); (3) 'aindra', a five-day affair meant for preventing famine and draught (*durbhiksha-nāśa*); (4) 'ārsha' (also called 'mānusha'), which is conducted for seven days, meant to secure prosperity for the kingdom (*rājya-vardhaka, lakshmī-prīti-kara*); and (5) 'daivika' (or 'vaishṇava'), a nine-day celebration meant to bring about alround protection and happiness of the people (*sarva-rakshārtha, prajā-sukhāvaha*). The *brahmotsava* of nine-days is regarded as 'superior', viz., most beneficial (*sāttvika*), and the festivals of seven and five-days are respectively 'of midling merit' (*rājāsa*) and 'inferior' (*tāmasa*).

The most impressive event of the *brahmotsava* is of course the procession of the presiding icon in an elaborately decorated and tastefully got-up chariot (*ratha*), to the accompaniment of music, dance, chanting and incessant cheers from the crowds of devotees. The procession leaves the temple in an auspicious and previously determined moment and goes round the main roads of the village or town. As the chariot carrying the deity winds its way, pulled by eager crowds, householders stop the chariot in front of their houses and offer flowers, fruits and gifts to the deity. The car-festival, as it is generally described, marks the climax of the *brahmotsava* series of rituals.

Besides procession in the chariot, the presiding deity of the temple is also carried about in procession on different impressive models of birds and animals, vehicles (*vāhana*), on different days of the festival. Among the popular 'vehicles' are : palanquin (*śibika*), lunar orb (*chandra-maṇḍala*), solar orb (*sūrya-maṇḍala*), lion (*simha*), horse (*aśva*), elephant (*gaja*), swan (*hamsa*), snake (*ananta* or *śeṣha*), parrot (*śuka*), flower-pavilion (*pushpa-pīṭha*), and the mountain Meru and the wish-fulfilling tree (*kalpa-vṛksha*). In Śaiva temples, bull (*vṛshabha*), and in Vaiṣṇava temples, Garuḍa and Hanumān are also used as 'vehicles'; in temples dedicated to Skanda (Subrahmaṇya), peacock (*mayūra*) is used. These 'vehicles' are usually made of wood with metal

cover (often gold-plated), and will be splendid specimens of metal craft. They will be among the proud collections of the temple, and will be displayed in a separate pavilion (*vāhana-maṇḍapa*).

Texts prescribe what 'vehicles' are to be used on different days of the festival. They also include a spectacular function within the temple enclosure, when the deity is seated in a 'swing' (*āndolikā*) and entertained. *Parama-purusha-samhitā*, which allows a twelve-day festival, prescribes palanquin on the first day, followed by lunar-orb, lion, snake, Hanumān, elephant, chariot, horse, swan and solar orb on the subsequent days in order. *Garuḍa-samhitā*, which envisages a fifteen-day festival prescribes the following

‘vehicles’ in order : flower-pavilion, solar orb, lunar-orb, lion, snake, peacock, Hanumān, Garuḍa, chariot, horse, swan, swing, wish-fulfilling tree and flower-chariot (*pushpaka*). *Vāsishṭha-samhitā*, which suggests only a six-day festival, prescribes lion, Garuḍa, chariot, horse, swan and swing for the six days respectively.

During processions on the streets as well as rituals within the temple during festivals, several musical instruments (stringed, percussion and wind), which are unique to temple music, are employed. In South India, among the instruments used are *maddale*, *karāḍige*, *segaṇḍi*, *kaī-maṇi*, *paraī*, *śankham*, *yāl*, *kuḷal*, *uḍukkai*, *kuḍamūlam*, *kalam*, etc. During temple festivals, it is also a custom

to feed the people freely on all the days of the festival. Events that add fun and frolic, gaiety and tempo to the festival are also included, such as ‘hunting in a forest’ (*vana-yātrā*), when the presiding deity, dressed up as a hunter, is carried outside the village into the jungle along with young men wielding weapons like spear, cudgel, bows and arrows, or ‘sport in water’ (*jala-kelī* or *vasantotsava*), or yachting or floating.

Festivals that are annual in character and are conducted on fixed days in the calander (like the *vishu*, *viśākhā*, two *ayana-sankrāntis*, *pushyā*, *kṛittikā*, the birth constellation of the presiding deity, or the date determined by long custom for the *brahmotsava*) are called *nityotsava*. These must necessarily be performed, and

therefore constitute important events of a temple. Festivals like *kalyāṇotsava* (or celebrating the wedding of a presiding deity), *pavitrotsava* (purificatory ritual), and *adhyayanotsava* (recital of sacred hymns) are also significant.

The number of festivals a temple can afford is determined by the financial resources of the temple as well as the popular appeal the temple has. In the famous temple atop the Tirumalai hills in Andhra Pradesh, there were, even in the beginning of the seventeenth century, as many as 429 festivals to be performed in the 365 days of the year. Devotees and donors make adequate endowments for festivals of their choice to be conducted in the temple.

Apart from the festivals that are conducted in a temple as prescribed in the āgama texts, there are also festivals arranged by the wealthy or influential donors to celebrate their own birth-anniversaries. The endowments made for such festivals include food-offerings to the deity as well as free feeding of the pilgrims and devotees in the premises of the temple. Building a temple and consecrating it is also an occasion for festival that goes on for several days. Repairs, restorations, adding new structures, putting up the 'kalaśsm', or erecting the flag-post (*dhvaja-stambha*) are also occasions for festivals.

The conduct of a festival requires not only a large group of volunteers, who are lay but devoted,

but also a body of specialists in ritual, experts in astrology, masters of ceremony, priests with different liturgical equipment, craftsmen and musicians. The festival is an excellent illustration of team-work. It is an occasion for the entire population of the locality to come together, cooperate and participate in a socio-religious activity. The temple is a public institution, and as such meta-individual and beyond the context of family and sectarian community. A festival in it is, therefore, an activity in which the entire population has a share and an obligation.

IV

SYMBOLISM OF RITUALS

Man's approach to God takes many forms. One of the most

widespread forms is worship. And worship naturally visualizes the incomprehensible divinity in terms of some concrete shapes and attributes, so that the worshipper may easily dwell on it mentally or engage himself in certain services. The āgama-texts mention that divinity conceived of as worshipful may be approached in one of four ways : (1) recitation of the names of divinity in standard formulae (*japa*); (2) oblations offered in fire (*homa*); (3) meditation on the transcendental and empirical aspects of divinity (*dhyāna*); and (4) actual worship of divinity as an honoured guest (*archanā*).

The first of these approaches takes God as a pattern of holy sounds (*śabda*), the second as

represented in fire (*agni*), the third as independent of concrete representation (*nirguna*), and the fourth as visualized in an icon (*archā* or *bimba*). Of the four approaches, the easiest for the common man to follow is the fourth; hence the popularity of temples. The other three approaches, however, are incorporated in the actual worship, so that worship in a temple is an integrated mosaic of different details.

The texts classify worship in a temple into Vedic, Tāntrik and Mixed (*miśra*) types. It is possible that temples or icons were envisaged in the Vedic culture. But the only concrete object of worship for the Vedic folk was fire (*Agni*), regarded as the visible representation of divinity, and a medium for all the

gods in the celestial realms. Oblations offered into the fire while articulating appropriate hymns constituted Vedic worship. The Tāntrik ideology, however, projected divinity in terms of human or semi-human form (*mūrti*) and in terms of diagrams of merit (*maṇḍala*), and of formulae of great import (*mantra*). Temples and iconic worship were a special feature of Tāntrik approach. But in actual practice, the two approaches coalesced, so that in the temple, icons and fire together received worship; *archā* and *homa* were alike rituals that were necessarily involved.

Symbolism is an ingredient of both *archā* and *homa* alike. The individual constitution (*piṇḍa*) and the cosmic organization (*brahmāṇḍa*)

are essentially indetical. The spirit inhabiting the body is in reality the God animating the entire universe. And human mind, functioning with limitations, can comprehend God only in terms of the spirit. Comprehending the really incomprehensible is possible only when forms are given to it. While one is fully aware that human or animal forms (*mūrti*), meaningful or meaningless sounds (*mantra*), and involved diagrams (*maṇḍala*) are mere human approximations, and as such thoroughly inadequate representations of divinity. He finds them useful in getting into communion with the highest. Whether it is *agni* or an *archā*, what it is is not as important as how it is approached. In rituals, concepts are more significant than percepts,

procedures more significant than concepts, and symbolism more relevant than procedures.

The worship ritual has therefore two distinct aspects : symbolic (or representational) and actual (or presentational). The former is technically known as *antar-yāga* ('internal ritual') or *mānasī-pūjā* ('mental worship'), whereas the latter is called *bahīr-yāga* ('external ritual') or the *upachāras* ('the services'). In the former, God is recognized as the worshipper's own innermost spirit, while in the latter the personified God (represented by the icon) is treated like an honoured guest. All the sixteen 'upachāras' (like invitation, seating, offering water for the feet, offering water to sip and rinse the mouth, providing

a bath, presentation of dry and fresh garments, serving food, etc.) are what were usually given in India for a guest. A guest, in the ancient reckoning, was indeed God in human form (hence the injunction, 'atithi-devo bhava').

Further, on the assumption that the human king derives his power and glory from God, God is treated like the king of kings. Many of the royal honours are, therefore, offered to the icon representing God, especially during festivals (e.g., umbrella, fly-whisk, music and dance, 'vehicles', flower-pavilion, swing, chariot etc). These are in fact known as 'rājopachāras' or 'royal services or honours'. And on festival occasions, the temple is made to look gorgeous and take on the appearance of a royal court.

There is, however, an awareness among the devotees that all this 'excitement' (called 'sambhrama' in the texts) incidental to 'external rituals' is only for entertainment and enjoyment, and that it is but secondary to the main worship which is only symbolic. It is described as an 'overflow' of religious devotion, meant to impress the lay folk that God must be the supreme concern.

More important than 'external' worship is the 'internal', consisting of several sequences like *śuddhi* (purification of elements), *nyāsa* (placement of divine attributes), *mudrā* (assumption of appropriate and effective gestures), *prāṇāyāma* (regulation of breath in order to facilitate the contemplation on the abstract character of divinity),

dhyāna (contemplation), *prāṇa-pratishṭhā* (infusion of life into the deity), *sohambhāvanā* (assumption of identity of worshipped with the worshipper), *mantra* (the sacred formula which helps realizing the deity in ones own heart), and *maṇḍala* (mystical diagrams representing aspects of divinity).

'Internal ritual' is mostly conducted within the sanctum, and in private, screened from public gaze; and by the priests specially initiated into it. The deity stationed in the sanctum, is but an alibi; the priest recognizes the deity as abiding in his own heart. When he contemplates on the deity he attempts to identify the parts of his own constitution (physical as well as psychical) with the assumed aspects

of the divine constitution of the deity. The *dhyāna* thus is an important sequence in 'internal worship'. It is not prayer, nor is it laudatory in character : there are no desires expressed, and no gain contemplated. It is essentially an attunement of the inherently divine nature of the worshipper with the essentially divine nature of the deity visualized.

The selection (and communication) of an appropriate and effective *mantra* for the worship of the deity is an indispensable prerequisite. The priest relies on this for the evocation of the power of the deity. He utilizes also standard and mystical designs called *yantras* or *maṇḍalas* as fit abodes for the deity during worship. In fact,

‘internal worship’ regards the body itself as a *yantra* for the deity to reside. During ‘prāṇa-pratishṭhā’ sequence, the priest extracts the power (*tejas*) or lustre of the deity (that is within his own heart) out of his body through his breath (inhalations and exhalations, *ucchvāsa-nihśvāsa*), and invests it upon the physical icon, making an abstract *yantra* on it, and presenting certain *mudrās*. The formula recited during this ritual invokes the divinity within his own heart to come out (‘bahīr āgatya’) and reside with ease (‘sukham tishṭhatu’) in the icon in front (‘asmin bimbe’) until the worship ritual is completed (yāvat pūjāvasānagam’).

It is only when the deity is thus duly externalized, and made to

be invoked (*āvāhita*), established (*sthāpita*), present close at hand (*sannihita*), positioned right in front of the worshipper (*sammukha*), confined to the icon (*sanniruddha*), and well concealed (*avagunṭhita*), that the ‘external’ worship consisting of the services and honours (*upachāra*) becomes relevant and meaningful. Having come out of the worshipper, the deity is now fit to be worshipped as an object outside him; it is treated as an honoured guest, as the most excellent royal personage who has arrived just then. But unless the worshipper retains the fundamental identity with the worshipped, despite the objectification of the latter, worship is again irrelevant. Hence the textual prescription: ‘God is not to be worshipped by one who has

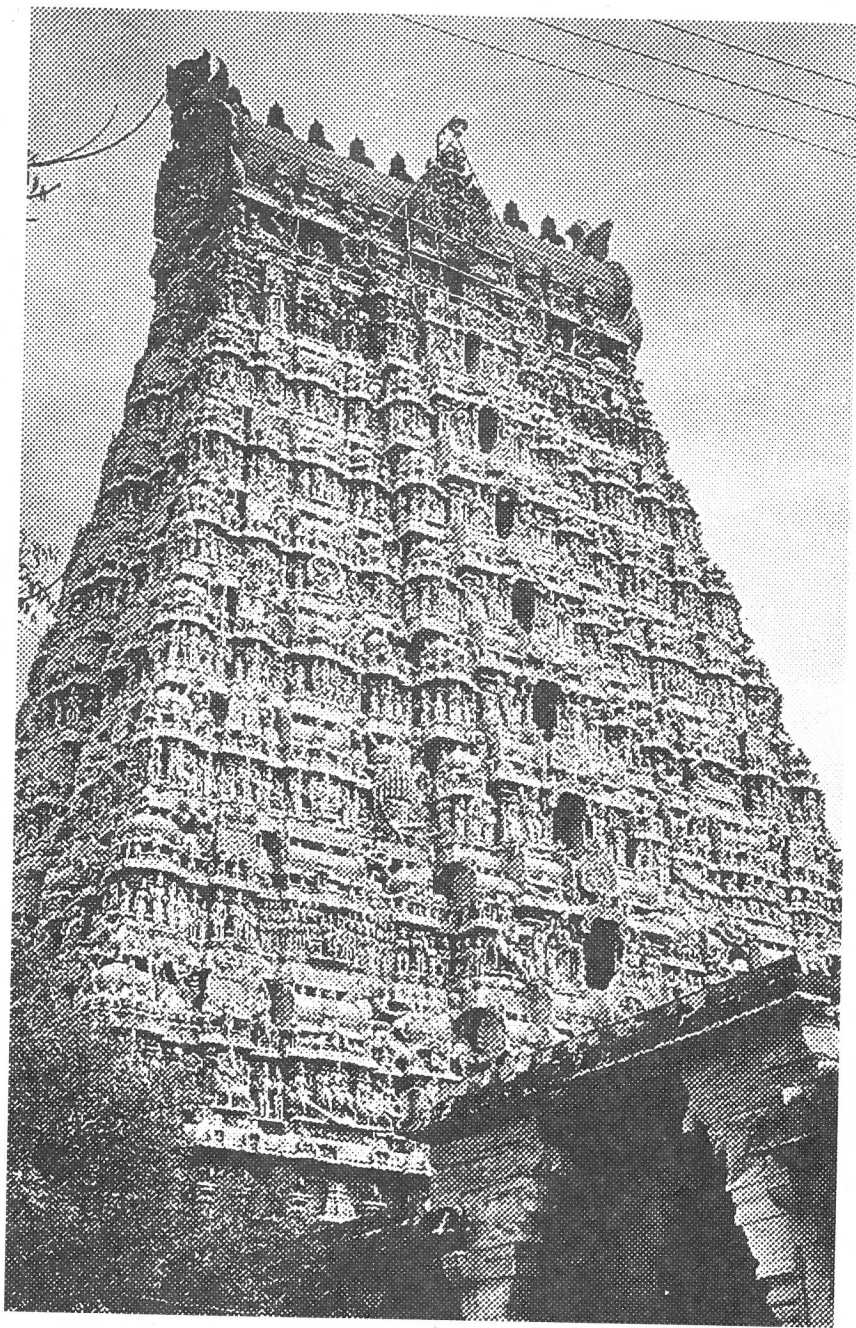
not priorly become God himself' ('nādevo bhūtvā devam pūjayet').

When the formal worship is completed, the deity is 'dismissed' or sent away (*visarjana*). The ritual signifying this involves a 'taking back' of the divine presence (temporarily lodged in the icon) into the worshipper's own heart (which is its permanent residence). The worshipper recites the *mantra* which means 'Come, O God who is residing in the icon, come into my heart-lotus' ('Ehy ehi, pratimā-sthita purushottama, mama hṛtkamale'); 'Reside in my heart, O lord of the world, along with your glory' ('hṛdaye kuru samvāsam śrīyā saha jagatpate').

The 'placement' (*nyāsa*) of divine presence in the human constitution is a necessary ritual sequence before the 'services' (*upachāra*) can be offered. It takes three forms : (1) *māṭṛkā-nyāsa*, the placement of the fifty seed-sounds in the several psychic centres (*chakras*) and on different parts of the body; (2) *devatā-nyāsa*, the placement of different aspects of the deity on different limbs; and (3) *tattva-nyāsa*, the endowment of the twenty-four basic factors (according to the Sāmkhya system of thought, which is accepted by all schools of Indian philosophy) to the abstract deity, so that it is individualized. The first form is purely Tāntrik in character, and accomplishes the analysis in the abstract of the entire expressive aspect of the universe (symbolized by speech).

The second form is also Tāntrik, although the Vedic influence in it is obvious, and it has a sectarian character. The aspects of the God dealt with here are so many powers (*śakti*), enumerated and named according to the seat to which one belongs. The Vaishṇavas adopt what is known as the 'Keśavādi-nyāsa', while the Śaivas follow 'Śrīkaṇṭhādi-nyāsa', and the Śāktas 'Kalā-nyāsa'. The third form is largely Vedic, although Tāntrik elements are discernible in it. The first two forms of *nyāsā* transform the divine character of the worshipper into an abstract form of the deity, which is purely conceptual and therefore unfit for external worship. The last form, however, provides a constitution for this abstract (*nirguṇa*) form, so that worship rituals could be carried out for it.

While this is the general symbolic significance of the worship ritual, there is a different ideology behind the worship conducted in temples where the image in the sanctum is regarded as 'self-manifest' (*svayambhū*) or 'installed by celestial beings' (*deva-pratiṣṭhā*). The image in such cases is a permanent repository of divine power, and the priest worships it without having to go through the 'prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā' ritual. For administering the 'services' (*upachāra*), however, a smaller replica (*Kautuka-bera*) of the main image is used. And this image needs to be infused with life at the time of 'services'. But the priest draws the power from the main image itself and not from his own heart.



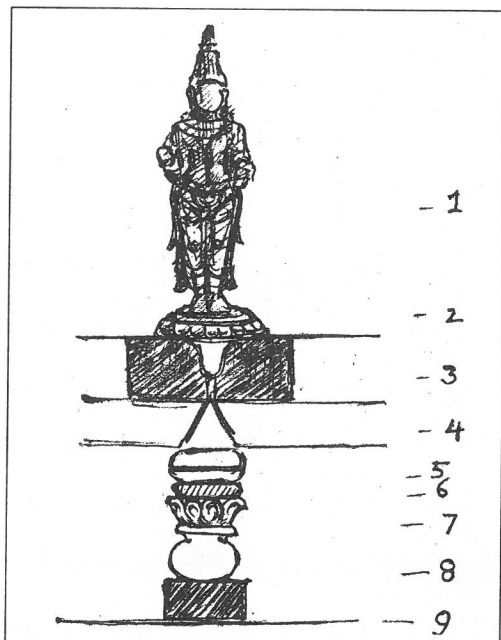
CHAPTER XIII

SYMBOLISM

The Upanishads speak of the “inverted tree”, *aśvattha*, with roots hidden above and branches spreading below (*Kaṭha*, 2, 3, 1). The tree is an ancient analogue of life here and beyond. We find references to it in the *R̥gveda* itself, and we find it illustrated in the Indus Valley seals. The folk cults are filled with reverential involvements of trees. Trees have been claimed as totems, trees have been worshipped as divinities, and trees have played an important role in our economy. The two trends in the growth of the tree, the visible upward and the invisible downward, emphasize the principle of complementarity in

human life of the practical and the spiritual. The Indian temple has not only been associated with trees, but it is in fact itself a representation of the life-tree. It pictures the principle of complementarity. The sanctum is a model of the normal tree with roots below and branches above; and the spiral tower of the sanctum symbolizes the inverted tree, with roots above and the spreading branches below.

We have seen that before the sanctum (the ‘Comb-chamber’, *garbha-gr̥ha*) is constructed, the ritual of ‘impregnation’ (or ‘depositing womb’, *garbha-nyāsa*) is



1. Icon; 2. Pāda-Pīṭha; 3. Adhishṭana-śīta;
4. Yoga-nāla; 5. Kanaka-Kūrma; 6. Rajata-
kūrma; 7. Śilā-padma; 8. Nidhi-kumbha;
9. Ādhāra-śilā.

gone through. The 'womb' that is deposited in an underground chamber is a consecrated copper-pot containing the essential ingredients of growth and prosperity. It represents the roots of the temple-tree. The sanctum rises above it in

distinct tiers : the most fundamental tier is nature itself or the earth (*prakṛti*, in Tamil *aḍippaḍai*), and over it is laid the primary plinth or 'base' (*tala*), to be covered by the secondary plinth or 'seat' (*pīṭha*). The three levels of growth are securely bound by a ritual as well as an engineering device known as 'packing' (*bandha*). Above this packed surface is laid the 'bed' of the sanctum (*adhishṭhāna*, 'base' or 'support') which is seen as the floor.

Walls rise from the 'bed' on all the four sides. It may be noted that the early sanctums were circular or apsidal in shape. A circle signifies the entire universe; and the sanctum is indeed a model of the universe. The primitive huts were also circular and they were nearer the model of

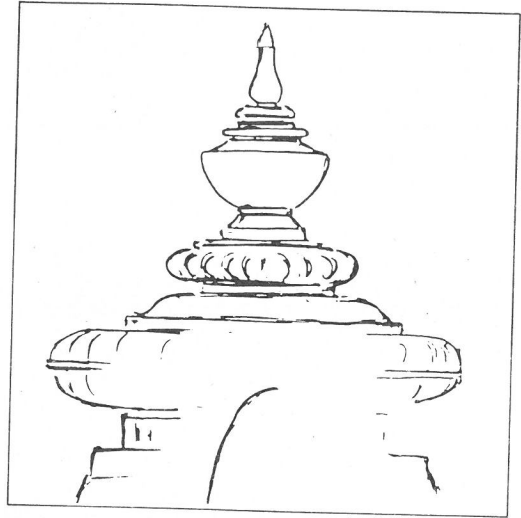
the universe than modern buildings are. When the *āgama* texts began to look upon the world as being 'bound by the four directions, they insisted that the shape of the sanctum must be a square, with its opening normally facing the East. The spot where the 'womb' is hidden would be the seat of the icon. The icon represents the sap of the temple tree, the four walls would indicate the spreading branches alround. The roof resting over the walls is technically called the 'row of doves' (*kapotapāli* or simply *kapota*), after the birds that perch on tree-tops. The sanctum is thus a neat model of the growing tree.

The early sanctum had a flat-roof, but there was an urge towards a superstructure above it, a spiral

or pyramidal tower which may be circular or polygonal in shape. The name for this architectural limb is '*vimāna*', which expression has two connotations: "that which is without (vi) comparison (*māna-upamā*)", and "that which brings about (*vimāyate*) fruits". The latter connotation, according to the Vedic commentator Sāyaṇa, refers to the Fire-God, Agni, who bestows benefits on the performers of sacrifices. The tower over the sanctum is a physical representation of Fire. It is interesting that the foundation of the temple is made to represent Earth (*pr̥thvī*), the walls of the sanctum Water (*āpa*) and the tower over it Fire (*tejas*); the finial of the tower stands for Air (*vāyu*) and above it is the formless space (*ākāśa*). The sanctum is thus a constellation of

the five elements that are basic to the entire universe. And Fire being the active element that fuses the others, the tower becomes an important limb in the structure of a temple.

The flat-roof (*kapota*) of the sanctum on which the tower rests and rises is overlaid by a single square stone slab known in the texts as 'the stone denoting the upper passage of life' (*brahmarandhra-śilā*). The sanctum is viewed as the head. Right on top of the head is the passage through which the currents of life ascend to the higher realms. The life of the sanctum ascends to the tower through this stone slab. Around the four corners of this slab are placed the images of the vehicles or emblems that characterize the

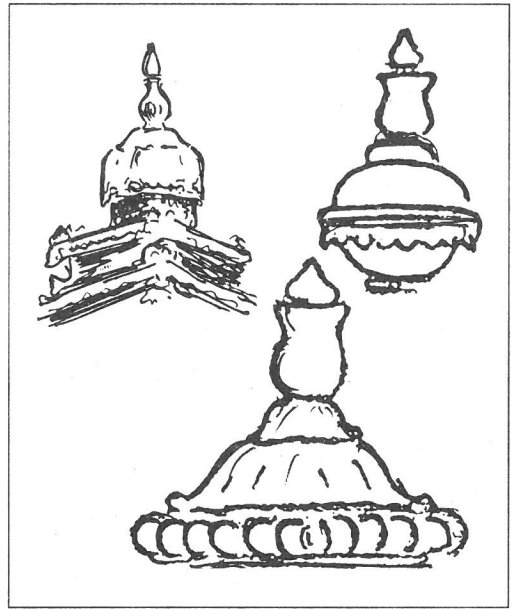


icon inside the sanctum. If the icon is Śiva, bulls are shown; if Śakti lions; if Viṣṇu the sacred eagles (*garuḍa*); and if Subrahmaṇya peacocks.

The vehicles are normally on a level lower than their owners. What then is the significance of the deities of vehicles above the sanctum? They act as door-guardians for the icon in the sanctum. But where are the doors

there? Here is an interesting aspect of the tower. The guarding deities stand between the sanctum and the tower, admitting the forces that descend through the tower into the sanctum. The tower is the inverted tree. The main mass of the tower represents the spreading branches, and the finial above it the roots.

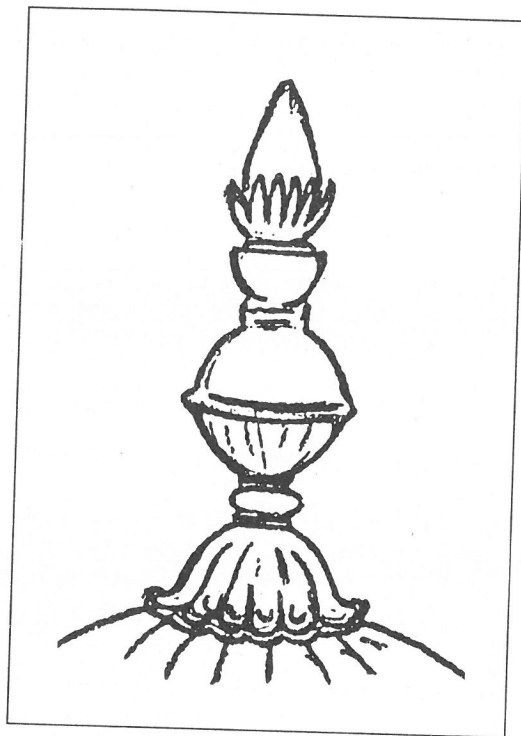
Over the stone slab mentioned above, the 'neck' (*grīva*) is introduced. And on the 'neck' rests the dome of the tower. The term *vimāna* refers to the structure between the top-slab (*upāna*) and the finial (*stūpī*). Early *vimānas* were circular and conical, in keeping with the circular shape of the early sanctums. It rose in tiers (from one to twelve *talas*) of diminishing circumference until it ended in the



point of the finial. Later the body of the *vimāna* tended to be polygonal. Four-sided *vimānas* have become popular; six-sided and eight-sided ones are not rare. There are a few temples with the *vimāna* having as many as sixteen sides. The Kaḷḷalangar temple at Madhurai is reputed to have as many as 64 sides. The prevailing shape in all such towers is pyramidal. But the

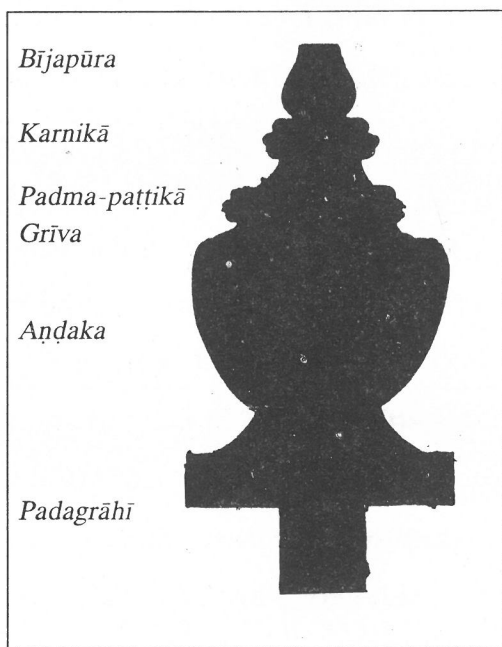
early conical towers were close imitations of the conical thatched roof of the circular hut, built around a central bamboo pole which projected beyond the roof. Whatever the later form the tower took, the basic image of the cone or spire or pyramid persisted. The branches of the inverted tree spreading around is the vision in the background.

Above the *vimāna* rests the 'vase' *kalaśa*), representing the roots of the inverted tree. Texts mention that the original *kalaśa* was born as one of the fourteen precious gems that came out of the milky ocean when it was churned: and they suggest that it symbolizes blessing (*Prāsāda-mañdana*). The old name for this unit was "kāma-kumbha" or the 'pitcher of desire'. In the



architectural development of the Indian temple, this feature arrived late, and its arrival appears to be subsequent to the canonical texts. And the early *kalaśas* were probably only stone blocks, round or ribbed. They were in the nature of cap-stones that held structurally as well as stylistically the *vimāna*, especially

when it was tall and tapering, as in the North Indian temples. The copper vases were later innovations. Sometimes brass was used; opulence and vanity prompted gilded ones. But the *āgama* books favour copper. The *kalaśa* is actually a vessel, like the vessel that is deposited under the sanctum. And, like the latter, this also is made to contain tokens of growth and prosperity, viz.,

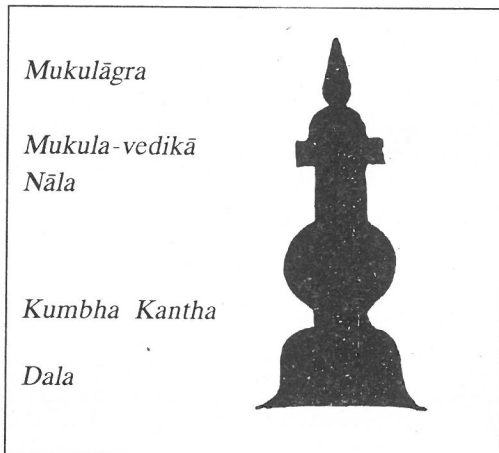


cereals with subtle seeds (such as millet) and nine precious stones.

This feature has several members, such as ‘the foot-hold’ (*pādagrāhī*) which is structurally imbedded in the masonry of the tower, ‘the egg’ (*aṇḍa*) or the belly, ‘the neck’ (*grīva*), ‘the lotus-band’ (*padma-paṭṭikā*), ‘the rim’ (*karnikā*), and the ‘bud’ (*bīja-pūra*). The shape of this unit could resemble the bell, the flower-bud, the lamp, coconut, altar or pot. The significance of all these shapes is that it symbolizes the potentialities of life.

The ritual of installing the metal vase over the brick and mortar body of the tower is an interesting one. The vase is not bound to the tower by any packing material like mortar or cement. It is only fixed by a

hollow rod that juts out of the center of the tower and runs through the vase. It is through this tube that the 'tokens' (cereals and precious stones) are introduced. It is sealed above the body of the *kalaśa* before the 'bud' rises.



The body has five limbs: the 'seat' (*pīṭha*) in the form of a lotus flower whose petals open out completely; the 'neck' on which the bulging out 'pot' (*kumbha*) which is the next limb, rests; the 'brim' or

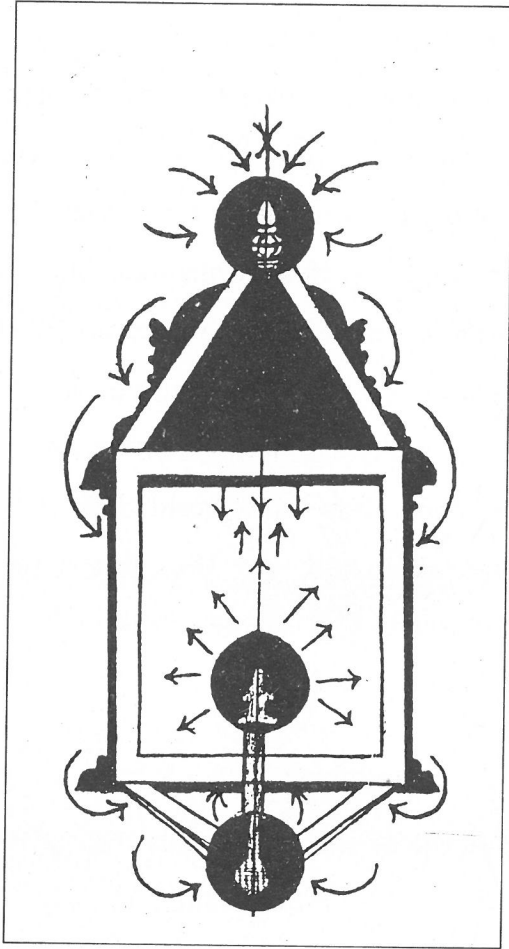
lid for the 'pot'; the 'flower' which opens upward; and finally the 'flower' bud which tapers off to a point. The 'bud' is actually the central part of the flower whose peripheral petals are separated. It signifies new life and growth. The *kalaśa* has an important hidden component, viz., 'the golden person' (*suvarṇa-purusha*), who is regarded as the very soul of the temple. The belly of the *kalaśa* is made to contain a tiny cot made in silver, copper or sandal-wood, over which is laid on a soft-feather mattress the golden icon of this 'person', with one hand holding a lotus flower over the heart and the other carrying a triple-flag. Four little pots made in gold, silver or copper, and containing consecrated water are placed on the four sides of the cot. Near the

recumbent 'person' is kept a golden or silver pot filled with ghee. The procedure of introducing this 'golden person' into the body of the *kalaśa* is known as *hṛdaya-varṇaka-vidhi*. It is described in detail in such texts as *Aparājita-paripṛicchā* and *Dīpārṇava*.

The entire structure of the *kalaśa* thus represents the roots of the inverted tree. It bears a correspondence with the 'womb' under the sanctum. Both are roots, the latter urging the upward growth of the ordinary tree, and the former the downward growth of the inverted tree. The 'womb', the icon and the finial are structurally collinear and run along the same axis of divine consciousness. This consciousness in its ascent transforms itself into the

icon, and materializes into the sanctum. In its descent, it runs through the finial and is concretized as the mass of the tower. Under the ground it is in a dormant, nebulous condition; and in the sanctum it gets transformed into a world of materiality and activity. In the tower it rises above this world, before it is absorbed in the universal consciousness at the peak of the final.

Man's approach is one of ascent of matter towards the spirit. But it becomes meaningful only if there is a complementary process of descent : the divine spirit must flow down into the material. The finial of the tower symbolizes the dual act of gathering the divine essence from the formless cosmos and



communicating it to the main mass of the tower. The essence here acquires a concrete form and then descends into the sanctum, to be focussed in the icon. The sanctum

is man's head, as will be evident in the analogue we will shortly consider. The stone slab over the roof (*brahma-randhra-śilā*) is the top of the head, representing the esoteric passage known as *brahma-randhra*. The hollow tube in the vase is the external projection of the main channel in the human constitution, the *sushumṇā-nāḍī*. The axis on which the 'womb', 'the icon', and the finial are positioned is also the path along which the ascent and descent of vital forces may be achieved.

The shrine thus demonstrates the constellation of the human and the divine currents; matter moves up and the spirit flows down. The devotee that stands in front of the icon is expected to partake in this

transaction. The emanations that proceed from the icon must be picked up by faith in his heart. Devotion is the transformer. The rituals conducted within the shrine involve these ideas, and attempt to facilitate transformation along the horizontal axis of icon-devotee. The devotee represents active matter and the icon passive spirit. The two are brought together in the creative act of worship.

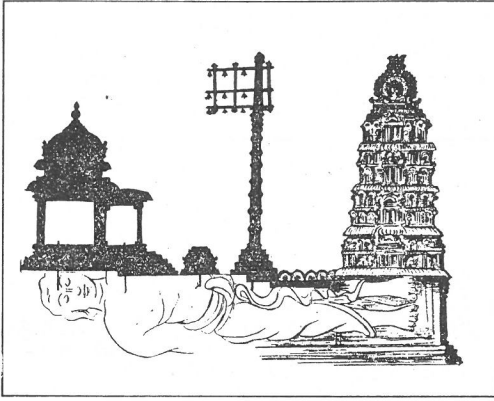
When the Upanishads speak of the 'inverted tree', they mean the phenomenal world of matter and spirit having its roots in the 'unmanifest' emanation of the Absolute. The reference is to man that is involved in the world of ignorance, passion, desire and activity. Man's roots are hidden in

the abstract, 'thousand-petalled lotus' (*sahasrāra*), a center just above the head, outside the physical frame. He spreads out into the world and moves away from his roots. He is therefore distressed. The task before him is to discover the roots, and make them the real base for his being and becoming. This means an upward thrust on his part, and a concurrent descent from the source of his being, the 'thousand-petalled lotus'. The Yoga texts speak of different psychic centres in the body, pictured as so many lotuses with their petals bent downward, in the normal condition of existence; the adept will be able to reorganize and correct the vital currents inside him so as to give the petals the upward slant. It may be recalled that the level below the 'pot' in the finial

(above the *vimāna*) is pictured as a lotus with petals that droop and spread out, and the level above the 'brim' has a flower the petals of which turn up and close in. The sculptured motifs of lotus flowers with petals positioned thus are commonly to be seen in several aspects of temple structure. The row of flowers with petals turned upward is known to sculptors as 'padma-vari', and the row where the petals are bent down 'kumuda-vari'. The petals of the lotus turn up when the sun shines. The 'kumuda' is the blue water-lily that blooms when the moon is up. The divine grace is the sun, and man's effort is the moon. Their conjoint operation is what is pictured in such sculptured pieces.

The analogy of man's constitution with the temple

architecture is a favourite theme of many canonical texts like *Śrī-praśna*, *Vishṇu-tantra*, *Śilpa-ratna*, *Vātulā-gama* and *Aparājita-śilpa*. The texts insist that the devotee must approach the temple as if it were the body of the Divine. They further highlight significant correspondences. The sanctum is the head, the tower the top-knot of hair (*śikhā*), the pavilion middle parts of the body, the enclosure hands, and the entrance-tower feet. The icon within the sanctum is the personification of the mantras. The temple thus becomes a tool for the devotee and a technique of worship. We may recall what the Talmud suggests : "If you desire to perceive the invisible, then perceive the visible". This is precisely what the canonical texts drive at. Some texts



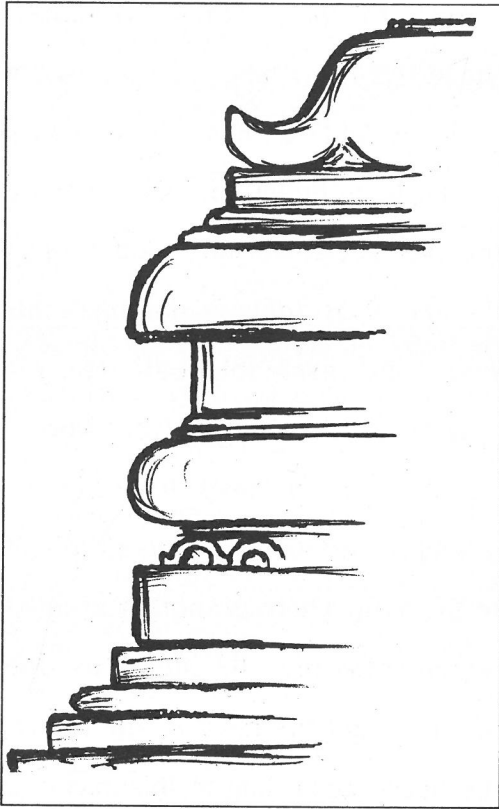
(e.g., *Parameśvara-samhitā*) point out that the base of the temple represents the earth, the sanctum the intermediate space, and the tower the heavens. In the scheme of 'seven worlds', the tower comprises three worlds: the seat thereof 'jana-loka', the pot portion 'tapo-loka' and the spike (*stūpī*) 'satya-loka'.

A more interesting thought is the projection of the temple architecture in terms of human constitution. The saying that "the

human body is said to be the temple and soul the icon" is found in many texts. The architectural terms used in all the texts are the names of parts of the human body : 'feet' (*pāda*), 'knee' (*jānu*), 'thighs' (*jaṅghā*), 'belly' (*kukshi*), 'neck' (*giīva*), 'shoulders' (*kandhara*), 'nose' (*nāsikā*), 'face' (*mukha*), 'head' (*śīrsha*) and so on. As a temple is laid out, it is said to picture a man lying down. His feet connote the entrance-tower, his genital organ the flag-staff (*dhvaja-stambha*), his belly the assembly-hall (*raṅga-maṇḍapa*), his heart 'the porch' (*antarāla* or *śukanāsi*), his head the sanctum, and the brows meet the seat of the icon. There is another account which reckons the neck as the sanctum and the head as the tower; the heart, according to this account,

is the porch where the devotee stands and looks at the icon.

The forehead of man is said to represent the sanctum, and top of head, the tower. The space between the eyebrows is the seat of the icon. The icon is located in the



ājñā center. The finial of the tower is unseen above the head, in the *sahasrāra* region; and the 'womb' of the sanctum at the tip of the nose.

Here is a more detailed scheme of correspondance given in *Śilpa-śāstra* (purusha-rūpa of ālaya)

पादौ पादशिला तस्य जंघा पादोर्ध्वमुच्यते ।
 गर्भश्चैवोदरं ज्ञेयं कटिश्च कटिमेखला ॥१॥
 स्तम्भाश्च बाहवो ज्ञेया घंटा जिह्वा प्रकीर्तिता ।
 दीपः प्राणोऽस्य विज्ञेयो ह्यपानो जलनिर्गमः ॥२॥
 ब्रह्मस्थानं यदेतच्च तन्नाभिः परिकीर्तितः ।
 पादचारस्त्वहंकारो ज्योतिस्तच्चक्षुरुच्यते ॥३॥
 तदूर्ध्वं प्रकृतिस्तस्य प्रतिमाऽत्मा स्मृतो बुधैः ।
 नलकुंभादयो द्वारं तस्य प्रजननं स्मृतम् ॥४॥
 शुकनासा भवेन्नासा गवाक्षः कर्ण उच्यते ।
 कायपाली स्मृतः स्कन्धो ग्रीवा चामलसारिका ॥५॥
 कलशस्तु शिरो ज्ञेयो मज्जादिमरसंयुतम् ।
 मेदश्च वसुधा विद्यात् प्रलेपो मांस उच्यते ॥६॥
 अस्थीनि शिलास्तस्य स्नायुः कीलादयः स्मृताः ।
 चक्षुषी शिखरालयस्य ध्वजाः केशाः प्रकीर्तिताः ।
 एवं पुरुषरूपं तद्ध्यात्वा च मनसा सुधीः ॥७॥

Vātulāgama provides a briefer picture.

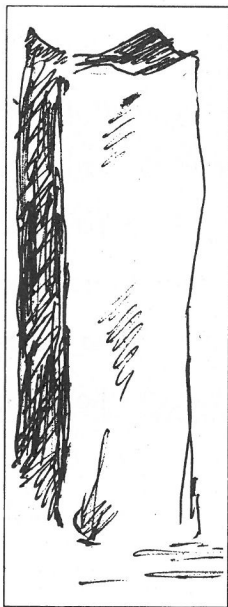
गर्भगेहं शिरः प्रोक्तं शिखा शिखरमुच्यते ।
नासिका शुकनासी स्यादलरालं गलं स्मृतम् ॥1॥
मण्डपं देह इत्युक्तं प्राकारः कर उच्यते ।
गोपुरं पाद इत्युक्तं देवस्थानं प्रकथ्यते ॥2॥

Mention must be made here of the structural detail known as the altar or 'the dispensing seat' *bali-pīṭha*), which is an indispensable associate of the sanctum. As already described, it is a small but stylized stone seat that is installed directly in front of the icon and very near the sanctum. Some texts prescribe that it must be outside the *gopura* or the first enclosure (*Vishṇu-tilaka, Mānasāra*). It is on this seat that the food offerings to the attendant divinities and the guardian goblins are placed, after the main food offering to the icon in the sanctum has been completed. There will be several such seats around the

sanctum in positions determined by the canonical texts. Usually altars are provided in the eight directions, but the one in front of the sanctum is regarded as the chief *pradhāna*), and it will be the most ornate, and stylistically majestic, with several limbs such as the base, cornices, wall-surface with door-lets or niches. It is usually made of hard granite, but it is also built in bricks and mortar. There is a provision also for metal ones and when the altar is wooden it is recommended to be covered by metal sheets (*Kāraṇāgama*). Texts like *Śilpa-ratna* indicate that mud altars were also common at one time. Most texts suggest that the size of the altar should be 1/8, 1/7 or 1/5 of the dimension of the sanctum. Depending on their sizes and shapes,

altars are classified into several types such as Śrī-bandha, Padma-bandha, Śrī-bhadra, Sarvota-bhadra and so on. Further details about the rituals connected with the altar will be given later.

Its development and incorporation into the Indian temple architecture are hard to delineate. Perhaps, it is a remnant of the Vedic *yūpa*, and in many temples we do



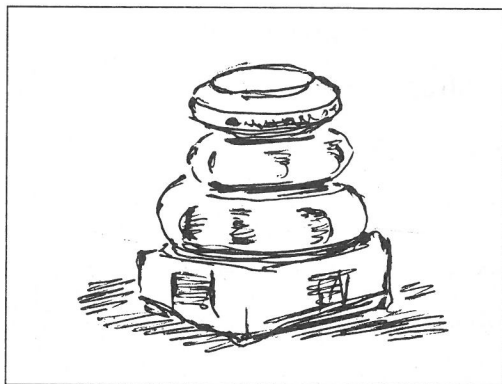
find *bali-pīṭhas* which are merely crude stone blocks or wooden posts. In the well-known temples, it is not unusual to find two 'dispensing seats' placed together, one

crudely simple and the other stylistically sculpted. The former can be presumed to be the original, and the latter a later addition. It is also likely that the stone seat in early days was meant to offer animal food, and some canonical texts do contain details of offerings which include flesh mixed with turmeric powder. Whatever the origin, this seat is ritualistically very significant. In fact, the area of the real temple reached only to these seats; whatever structure is beyond them is deemed to be secondary, answering more to the donor's fancy than to the prescriptions of the texts. A text clearly lays down that a shrine consists only of four limbs : the sanctum, the icon, the tower above the sanctum, and the 'dispensing seat'. And another text speaks of

the 'dispensing seat' as a replica of the tower above the sanctum.

A text claims that the dispensing seat and the tower above the sanctum (*vimāna*) are indeed the same, for it is there that the gods assemble (*Nārāyaṇa-saṃhitā*). Indeed the shapes of the two closely resemble each other, with the difference that the altar is crowned by a flat lotus motif while the tower ends in a round *kalaśa* surmounted by a spike (*stūpī*). And like the tower, the altar may be square, circular or polygonal.

The symbolism of this seat is not very different either. But its position is along the horizontal axis of consciousness. It represents the meeting place of the active



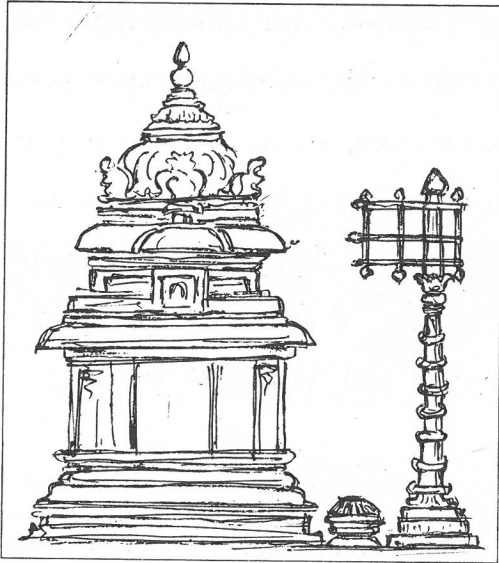
consciousness of the devotee and the passive consciousness of the divinity. In the projection of the temple-image on the human body, the 'seat' is located in the navel, which esoterically is considered the center or hub of man's physical existence. Before the devotee enters the porch in front of the sanctum, he has ceremonially to go round the 'dispensing seat', which act symbolizes centering himself adequately. It should prepare him to receive the emanations from the icon.

The flag-staff (*dhvaja-stambha*) is often seen close to the 'dispensing seat' in South Indian temples. It is usual for the two to be together. Some texts prescribe that the 'dispensing seat' must be located between the sanctum and the flag-staff, although in practice the flag-staff frequently takes the middle position. The custom of erecting this tall thin column, whose height varies from fifty to eighty feet, appears to be a late one. The early purpose was only to indicate the position of the sanctum. Even today, the mean shrines in villages and on highways when they are otherwise indistinguishable have flags on them, to show that they are places of worship. In North Indian temples, it is a practice to fly long and flowing banners from the tower itself. The

canonical texts favour wooden or bamboo poles, with an uneven number of joints, upto twenty-five. Covering them with metal plates was optional. And the flag-staff was not necessarily intended as a permanent structure. Putting it up marked the commencement of occasional festivals in the temple.

However, in course of time the permanently fixed flag-staff became a common feature in temple architecture. The wooden pole, covered with copper, brass, or even silver plates gilded, is installed on a raised stone platform, often square in shape, in front of the sanctum. The top portion of this tall mast will have three horizontal perches (symbolising righteousness, reputation and propriety or the three

divinities Brahmā the Creator, Viṣṇu the Preserver and Śiva the Destroyer), pointing towards the sanctum. The 'seat' of the flag-staff as well as the mast with perches came to be highly stylized in South India during the days of the Chōla and Pāṇḍya rulers, for the flag-staff was uniquely a royal insignia.



When the flag-staff became a permanent detail in the temple, the

commencement of festivals began to be signalized by ceremonially hoisting a flag on it (*masūraka*). Normally, however, the flag-staff will only be a column without the banner (*nishpatākā*). It would only indicate the limit of the consecrated area of the shrine. When occasion demands, a banner would be flown from its top (*sapatākā*). *Hayaśīrsha-samhitā*, a Pāñcharātra text, which insists that a building (*prāsāda*) without a flag would be in vain, gives some interesting details about the position and height of the mast, the type of bamboo that is to be chosen, the colour of the cloth for the banner, and so on. The benefit of the flag-mast is here said to be "obtainment of all that is desired". Another text, *Śiva-sarvasva* describes the purpose of the flag as indication of the

insignia of the deity, or of the characteristic vehicle of the icon that is within the sanctum.

The symbolism of the flag-staff is not clear in the textual accounts, probably because it was a late innovation and not a necessary involvement of the shrine. It was an introduction from royal association, and therefore the usual symbolism is that of victory and prosperity. A tall flag-post, richly decorated and elaborately installed, would mean a rich and prosperous temple commanding royal patronage; it is a sign of pomp and pride. God is the greatest of kings and the temple is His palace.

A text mentions that when the flag is hoisted in front of the temple, gods as well as manes will be

delighted. Otherwise, according to the text, demons and goblins would sneak in to make the temple their abode (*Prāsāda-maṇḍana*). The association of flag-posts with tall lamp-posts in the temples is well-known. One may recall that there is a custom of erecting tall *Yama-dīpas* on occasions to provide satisfaction for the departed ancestors and to illumine their path towards our realm. The flag-post is also magical in its significance. The texts assign Śiva to the bottom of the post, Brahmā to the middle portion and Viṣṇu to the top.

While in the South, the flag-cloth (*patākā*) is occasionally tied to the flag-post, it is ever present in the temples of the North. The length of the cloth in the latter case will

be equal to the length of the flag-post, which will be fixed to the top member of the tower over the sanctum. South Indian *vimānas*, however, are not meant to accommodate the flag-post, which is a distinct member, outside the inner enclosure.

But the 'flag' in the traditional context also means a resolve to exert and a will to succeed. Hoisting the flag suggests setting out to conquer. The devotee coming into the temple would have to resolve to conquer his own baser nature, to set out on a war with his own mean disposition; a look at the flag-mast would be a reminder for him in this regard. The Sanskrit word for the flag or banner, *dhvaja*, strictly means whatever is raised. It therefore has the

connotations of hope, desire (especially erotic desire which is physically expressed as erection, and the Sanskrit expression is frequently employed in this context), pride, arrogance and will. Whatever raises man to a higher level of understanding and activity is a *dhvaja*. It is a call that God is high and above (*Mahābhārata*, 1, 33, 17). The characteristic animal and the insignia of the icon on the banner gives a direction to the devotee's desire and will. When the devotee sights the banner and bows to it, he resolves to rise higher.

The Indian temple is thus a constellation of symbolism. It is an image that is at once relevant to human aspirations and persistent in human thought and actions. The

texts of Indian architecture which provide us with all the details of measurements and parts of the temple, and prescribe the rites of installation and rituals of worship, also indicate the real value of a shrine:

“The ritualists have their God in the fire; but the wise folk find Him in their own heart. It is the dull-witted one that seeks God in an icon. Those who have higher understanding see God in everything”.

अग्निर्देवो द्विजातीनां मुनीनां हृदि दैवतम् ।
प्रतिमा स्वल्पबुद्धीनां सर्वत्र विदितात्मनाम् ॥

