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Temples : Icons & Rituals

Vidyālaṅkāra
Prof. S. K. Ramachandra Rao

Suramā Prakashana
Bangalore - 11

Temples : Icons and Rituals

By
Vidyālankāra
Prof. S. K. Ramachandra Rao

Suramā Prakāshana
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The Editor's Note

Prof. S. K. Ramachandra Rao first wrote some books in both English and Kannada on various aspects of Temples in the years between 1980 and 1985. These were published by the India Book House (IBH). The Kalpatharu Research Academy published in 1997 a book - 'Indian Temple Traditions' which was a collection of these earlier books. As all these books are now out of print, the trustees of the Prof. S. K. Ramachandra Rao Memorial Trust decided to reprint them.

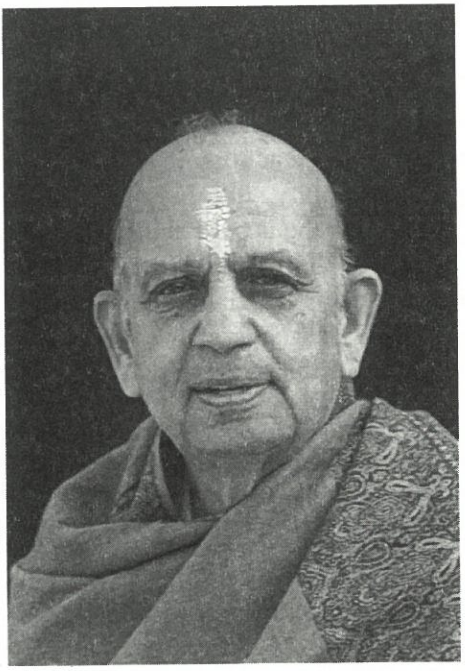
Two small publications - 'Icons and Images of Indian Temples' and 'Temple Rituals' have been put together and are being reprinted as a single book. The photographs of which there were quite a few in the earlier edition have been replaced by line drawings, mostly prepared by Prof. Rao himself. Some the line drawings have been taken from his magnum opus- 'Pratima Kosha', and from his other books like Devata-rupa-mala.

I thank Smt. Vasanthalakshmi for her efforts in preparing the manuscript and Vagartha for maintaining the good quality of printing.

Sarvadhari Samvatsara
Pushya, Sankranti,
January 2009

Dr. S. R. Sudarshan

About the Author



Prof S. K. Ramachandra Rao (1925-2006) was born in a conservative Madhva Brahmin family. He studied sanskrit in a pathasala in Nanjangud, and then learnt the prasthana traya with bhasya under Palghat Narayana Sastri. He also studied Pali and Tripitakas from Narada Mahathera

of Sri Lanka, and learnt Tibetan in order to study Tibetan Buddhism. He obtained an M.A. in Psychology from the Mysore University, and started his career as a research assistant in the Indian Institute of Science. He later headed the department of clinical psychology in NIMHANS in Bangalore.

A born teacher, he was a visiting professor at the Bangalore Unversity teaching in the departments of psychology, philosophy, indology, social work and education. He headed the department of Indian culture at the Callison College, University of the Pacific, Bangalore Centre. He was a senior associate of the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, and was on the guest faculty of the Indian Institute of Management.

He was a member of the Karnataka State Lalita Kala Academy and Sangita Nritya Academy, had served on the Agama Board, Karnataka and was on the advisory committee of the T.T.D. He had been honored with the 1986 Karnataka Rajyotsava Award.

He was a prolific writer, artist, sculptor, musicologist, scholar and orator. He had written more than 150 books in English and Kannada apart from books in Sanskrit and Pali on various aspects of traditional Indian Culture. His books on Iconography and on Tirupati were given the state Sahitya Academy awards.

He had been honored with the titles Vidyalankara, Sangita Kalaratna, Vachaspati, etc. He had received the Vedaratna Samman from the Swami Gangeshwaranandaji Trust, Mumbai.

Preface to the original books

The temple in India is designed to serve many purposes- social, economic, aesthetic and religious. The religious interest of the temple consists in its being a dwelling for an icon and the images that are sought to be evoked by the icon. The icon is to the temple what the spirit is to the body, and images are like the vital currents that relate the body with the spirit.

The icon-makers work in a traditional framework, and their artistic abilities are channelled in well-defined modes of expression which are relevant to the images associated with the icons. The variety of Indian icons acquires meaning only in a polytheistic context. It is a fact, often ignored, that Indian polytheism does not militate against the deeper philosophical conviction of monotheism, even monism. This apparently paradoxical detail has not been widely appreciated because scholars and critics, not rooted in the temple tradition, tend to stop at the icons and do not inquire into the relevant images which are stylized in the Agama texts.

Rituals constitute the essential detail of all cultural life, and especially so in social and religious fields. It is not possible oftentimes to distinguish between social and religious areas. Temple, for instance, is a complex institution involving both religious and social aspects almost in equal measure. And naturally the rituals that dominate the temple are socio-religious in their import.

Here is an attempt to consider temple-rituals in this context. Prescriptions found in the Agama texts provide the framework for the festivals and rituals as they are conducted now, but social idioms of the region in which the temple is situated also play an enormous role. The significance of this dual nature of the temple-rituals is sought to be highlighted in this book.

More important than the actual ritual is the symbolism thereof. It is this symbolism that operates as the thread of continuity between generations and as the web in which the entire community is enclosed. This detail is also dealt with here.

The present book seeks to aid such an inquiry. It highlights the canonical involvement in Indian icons, which apart from their artistic merit have a religious function to fulfil.

S. K. Ramachandra Rao

Chapter I

The Icon as a Paradigm

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 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 an 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 coordinated 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

The Egyptian deity Isis in Abidas Temple

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 'pratima', 'bimba' and 'bera'. 'Pratima' 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, 'murti', that is sometimes used; it signifies person-ification, in-carnation, formation. It is making an abstract idea concrete and practical.

The word *pratima* is an ancient one, found even in the Vedic hymns (e. g. *Rig- 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 Manibhadra (a folk god) has been found in Pol near Gwalior (in Madhya Pradesh) ; and another in a well in Mora near Mathura (Uttar Pradesh) which mentions the icons of the five heroes of the Vrshṇi clan (Sankarshaṇa, Vāsudeva and others). The *Rig- Veda* (6, 28,6) employs another word 'su-pratika' in the same sense as 'pratima'.

'Bimba' and 'bera', however, are more frequently employed in the Silpa texts. They are specifically sculptures in stone, wood, clay or metal, as

distinguished from *lekhya* (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.

Chapter II

The Polytheistic Frame Work

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 impossibe to determine the iconic significance of the seals.

One of the seals has become justly famous, although its enigmatic character has not been revealed by a convincing explanation. It is the seal found in Mohenjodaro representing a three-faced (?) male deity with horns, seated on a stool (*asandi)* 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 Pasupati-Siva (R. N. Dandekar), an earlier prototype of Śiva

(Father Heras), the Fire-god or Agni (B. A. Saletore), an earlier form of Vishnu (T. G. Aravamuthan), the creator - sculptor Tvashtr-Visvarupa (S. Srikantha Sastri), the Killer-god Kuejas (Hrozng), and some buffalo-headed composite deity (K. N. Sastri). The supposed nudity of the figure is explained as ithy-phallicism and F. O. Schrader is impressed by its similarity with the Celtic god Cernunnos.

The Indus-seal representing a divinity identified frequently as Siva-pasupati

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 (*pratima 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 Aryan 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, footprint, 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. Rig- Veda 3,9,9) but they were all aspects of a much smaller number of deities (only three in *Rig-Veda,* e.g., 10,158, I, Agni, Indra and Sūrya). The hymnal outlook is henotheistic (to use the expression coined by F. Maxmuller) : 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 *(adityas)*, 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-dasa*), even in the Vedic literature: as, for instance, the conception of the triad, Agni (Fire on earth), Vāyu (Wind in mid region) and Sūrya (Sun in the heavenly vault). This provided the background for the evolution of the triad of the popular religion in later India, Brahma, Śiva and Vishṇu.

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 Vedanta 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 Vedantic 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 coexisted, 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 *dhyāna-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: Vishṇu, Śiva, Śakti, Sūrya (the Sun) and Ganapati. The five constituted a family (*panchāyatana*), 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 Vishnu as the major deity, the other four being subordinated to him, and they came to be designated as 'Vaishnavas' (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; 'Śaktas' (with 17 sub-sects), who worshipped Śakti in the main; Sauras (with nine sub-sects) given to Sun-worship; and 'Gaṇapatyas' (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

ARDHANARISVARA
(Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Tanjore)

of Vishṇu-Śiva (Śankara-nārāyaṇa, Hari-hara), Vishṇu Sūrya (Sūrya - nārāyaṇa), Vishṇu-Śakti (Lakshmi-nārāyaṇa, Śrinivāsa), Śiva-Śakti (Hara-Gauri, Umā Mahesvara, Ardhanarīśvara), and Gaṇapati with 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 procedure in the manufacture of icons, the details of rituals associated with the worship, and the legends that provide the background.

Chapter III

Historical Perspective

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 'Gāndhara', after the name of the region. Although this art-form is heavily Greeko-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 Gāndhara 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 Gandhara 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 Gāndhara type in Taxila, Peshawar, Baniyan (where there is a colossal statue of the Buddha measuring 150 feet in height carved on a rock face), Hadda, and Jalalabad - all in

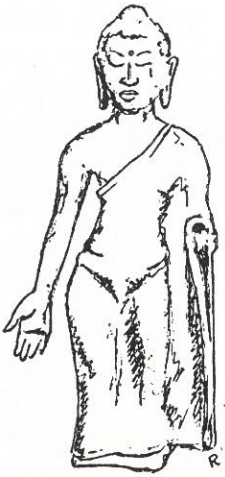
the Gāndhara region of those days. The statues are designed as if they were meant to be accommodated in an architectural pattern, although free-standing statues of those days are not rare.

But Gāndhara art is notoriously impersonal. The artists (sculptors, architects and craftsmen) were commissioned to execute works on Buddhist monuments by Indian patrons, especially by the Kushana (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 Gāndhara type are more portraits than icons; they scarcely suggest a transcendental feeling or the divine element. That is why the Gāndhara 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 Gāndhara 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.

Bronze image of Buddha belonging to early 5th century now in the British Museum London



An early bronze icon of Buddha (from Guntur, in Andhra Pradesh), now in London Museum; dated early 6th century

During the latter part of the second century, Nāgarjunakoṇḍa in the South, a celebrated Buddhist center of Mahāyāna persuation, witnessed the transformation from the iniconic to the iconic representation of the Buddha. A section of the Buddhist

monastic assembly, the Mahāsanghikas, favoured iconic worship in the shrines of common devotion (chaityas) in opposition to the more conservative Mahisasakas 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 Hellinistic realism with idealistic symbolism that was indigenous to India was the one that developed in the city of Mathura, about fifty miles south-east of Delhi, when the Gāndhara-style was half-way through its career. Mathura, under the Kushanas, 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 Patanjali (on Pāṇiṇi, 5, 3, 99). Mathura 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 Mathura 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, etc). And there was for centuries, in the city, a generous sprinkling of more or less resident foreigners: Greeks of Bactria, Scythians of Central Asia, Parthians of Iran and Kushanas of Mongolia. The craftsmen of Mathura 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-lakshaṇas*).

It was about the same time that temples also began to be built in a manner that was different from the *stūpa, chaitya or vihara.* 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 Agama corpus in Tamil already. It had got formed during the early centuries before and after Christ (from 500 A.D., according to V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar and M. A. Mehendale). The Āgama of all India relevance was naturally influenced by the Tamil Āgama.

The Vedic hold had to an extent slackened, and the Tantrik framework gradually assumed considerable importance. Worship in a temple is of course not a Vedic idea. There were no 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 found in Ghosundi (Nagari) near Chittore (Rajasthan), belonging to the second century B.C., which mentions that the King Gajayana, a bhāgavata who had also performed an *aśvamedha* sacrifice, got a temple (Nārāyaṇa-vaṭika) for Vāsudeva and Samkarshaṇa. 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 to a 'sacred shrine' (*mahā-sthāna*) at Mathura dedicated to the "worshipful Vāsudeva", during the reign of the Śaka satrap Shodasha, son of Rajuvala; we have also references to "the icons of the five worshipful heroes of the Vrishni clan" installed in this shrine.

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 bhagavata 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.

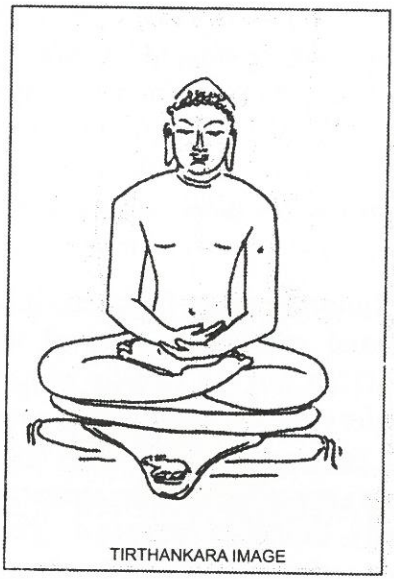
सहस्रशिरसे तस्मै पुरुषायामिततेजसे ।
चतुःसमुद्रपर्यङ्कतोयनिद्रालवे नमः ।।

The bhāgavata-cult began with an adoration of Vishnu, but its basic creed of devotion (*bhakti*) drew within its fold other popular gods also. The later Guptas were devoted to Siva (*parama-maheśvaras*) almost exclusively. Even Patanjali, the commentator on *Pāṇini* (5, 3, 99), was acquainted with "Śivabhāgavatas", and the early Kushāna princes got "Śivasthalas" (shrines to Siva) built as early as the first century after Christ. There

are several inscriptions in Kharoshti which mention this, and there are several early coins (as those of the Indo-Parthian ruler Gondophares and the Kushana prince Wema Kadphises) which unmistakably bear iconic representations of Śiva. Besides the later Gupta Kings, Bharasivas and the Vakaṭaka rulers, the Huna generals Maitrikas of Valabhi, and the Maukhari chiefs of Kanoj encouraged the Śiva-bhāgavata cult.

The innumerable folk divinities were accommodated within the general ideology of Bhagavata, 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 *bodhisattvas* were already being reverenced. The icons of *tirthankaras* (perfected saints guiding humanity) were objects of adoration among the adherents of the *Śramana*-tradition (Jains), these iconic saints were accompanied by folk divinities (*yakshas and yakshinis*).

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



TIRTHANKARA IMAGE

known as *sthapathis*, involved in the preparation of icons, came to be well-established.

Chapter IV

Elements of Iconometry

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-maṇa*), 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 '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' (*trāsa-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 twentyfour *angulas* (about eighteen of the common inches), the 'bowlength' (*dhanus*) which is four 'cubits', the 'churning-stick' (*danda*), which is a variant of the above, and so on.

There is also the measure known as 'mātrāṅgula', (or 'dehāngula'), the inch which corresponds to the length of the middle division of the middle finger of

Srinivasa ; a sculptor's sketch according to the standard *tala-mana*

the sculptor who makes the icon or the patron who commissions it. By a combination of these two 'inch

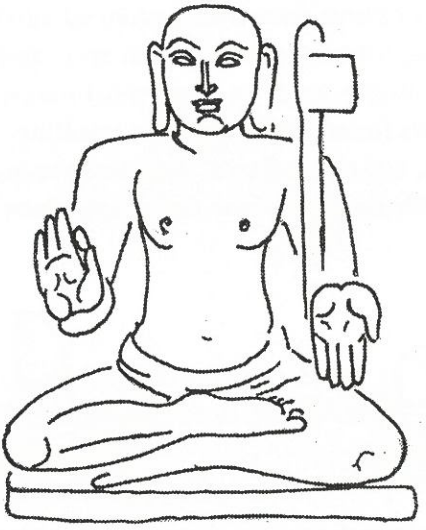
measures' (*mānāngula and mātrāngula*), we have the familiar practical measure in vogue.

The major gods like Vishnu and Śiva are prescribed to be made in the 'superior' *daśa-tāla* (ten-tala measure), viz. 124 *mātrāñgulas* in height from the top of head to the soles of the feet. Goddesses like Lakshmī, Saraswatī and Pārvati should measure to the 'midling' *daśa-tāla*, viz. 120 *mātrāngulas* ; as they stand they should reach up to the lower tip of the god's ear. The 'inferior' *daśa-tala* is meant for minor deities like Garuḍa, Śesha, Skanda, and guardians of the eight quarters; the height would be 116 m. The *nine-tala* measure (*nava-tala*) equals 108 m., and it is the measure for making the icons of the demi-god Indra and demons. There are varieties in this *tala-measure*: *navārdha-tala* (114 *m.*) for the planetary divinities; *uttama-nava-tala* (112 *m.*) for sylvan deities (*yaksha*), celestial musicians (*gandharva*), and dragons (*uraga*) ; and *sattryangula-nava-tala* (III *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 tala-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-tala measure (108 m.) which is most often used, then the height of the face would be 12 m., each division thereof being 4m., from neck to the middle of the breast-line 12 m., from these till the navel 12 m. and so on.

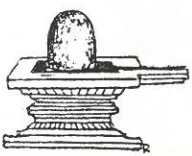
Measurements vary according to the subject matter (gods, spirits, human beings, animals, etc.). And each subject matter has numerous categories. For instance, if the icon is that of a human being, five types are recognized : 'hamsa' (superhumans, kings, human



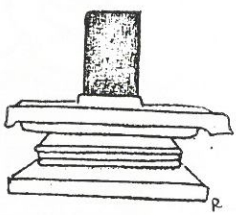
SAMKARA

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

Even the aniconic representations of the linga are subject to well-defined icono-metric 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' one six to four cubits, and the 'inferior' ones three to one. A stone *linga* which is under one foot high does not merit



Natural Linga fixed on a pedestal



Carved linga fixed to a pedestal

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 (Īsāna-śiva-guru-deva-paddhati, 40).

Nāradīya-Samhita (23, 110) recommends that an icon in stone, bronze or wood should be made in the nine-talā measure or the ten-tala. For the worship rituals (known as karmārcha), 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). These two structures are intimately associated with the icon in the sanctum. But the measures here are in terms of 'parts' (amśas), 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' (pāda-grāhi or base) will be two parts, the 'egg' (aṇḍaka) five, the 'neck' (grīva) two, 'lotus motif' (padma-patrika) three, the (Karṇika) 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 Padma-Samhita (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 altar belonging to the Sri-bhadra type

The altar belonging to the Padma-bandha type

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 *Śilpa-ratna*, *Padma-samhita* and *Vishvaksena-tantra*. Limbs or levels of the altar are also designated and the measurements given. There are several altars like the

Mahā-piṭha (21 'parts'). Śrī-bhadra (32 'parts'), Sarvato-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' (*pāduka*) at the bottom, 'platform' (*jagati*) on top of it, and on successive tiers 'flower-pattern' (*kumuda*), 'flower-slab' (*kumuda-pattika*) 'shoulder blade' (*gala*), 'neck' (*kambu*), 'dove-row' (*kapota*), 'top-slab' (*agra-patti*), 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.

Chapter V

The Craft Involvement

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. *Ajitaāgama* 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-priccha*) 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-śila, 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-śila*, eight coloured. having, streaks of grains, which, when struck, emit a hollow but pleasant sound), and 'neuter' (*napumsaka-sila,* 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-samhita* (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 blackstone (*krishna-śila*), 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 iconcarving: khadira, sandal, red sandal, aśoka, devadāru, bilva, sāla, kadamba, champaka, bakula, udumbara, arjuna and śālmali are frequently mentioned.

The location and nature of trees are important considerations. Trees in the burial grounds, on tankbunds, 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 iconmaking. 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 *Padmasaṁhita* (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 Vishnu 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-śāla*) 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 *vitana* from which cocoanuts and fly-whisks

hang. The stone or wood is placed in the center of this pavilion, and is worshipped with flowers, sandalpaste 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 (*āvahana*) just prior to the commencement of a ritual sequence, and are '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

Madhukeshvara at
Banavasi-processional image

to the spots of several rituals (*karmārcha*), such as bathing (*snapana*), procession (*utsava*), audience (*koluvu*), and and food-distribution (*bali*).

Three major metals are prescribed for the making of such icons: gold (pure, *jātarupa* or alloy,

hataka), 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 (*kāmsya*) and brass (*arakūta or paittala*) are used for portable icons. In the South, icons made of a mixture of five metals (*pancha-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 Kushāna period (second century) found at Shah-ji-Dheri. The Gupta craftsmen appear to have perfected the casting technique, known as 'lost wax' or cire perdue (*madhūcchishṭa-vidhāna*), although Tamil-Nadu became the center 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 Sultanganj. Nagapattinam icons in the South date almost from the same period.

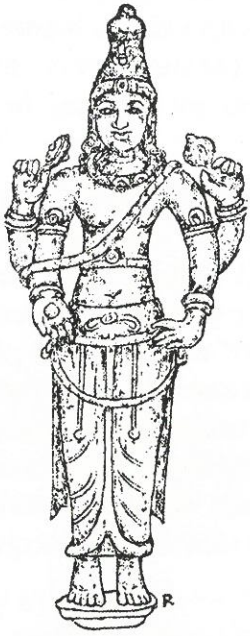
The original image is made in wax (bees's wax mixed with charcoal powder), and over this model a

coat of soft clay is applied leaving an opening, and left to dry. When perfectly dry, the clay coating 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.

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

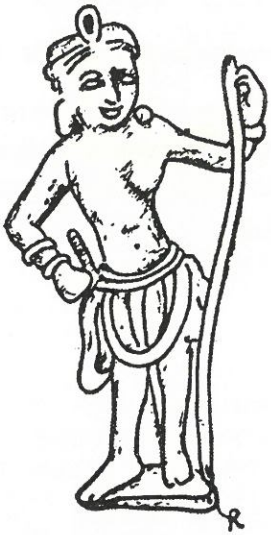
is altogether traditional and is so highly standardized that numerous icons fall into definite patterns, and look alike.



Srinivasa in Chera style of the 9th century now in the Trivandrum Museum

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.



Rama - an old bronze image found at Nagarjuna-Konda in Andhra Pradesh ; around 3rd century A. D.

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 time (*Brihatsamhita*) -

देशानुरूपभूषणवेशालंकारमूर्तिभिः कार्या प्रतिमा ।

This gives the icon a fair degree of plasticity. This also helps to accommodate within stylized iconography numerous divinities that came to be introduced afresh from time to time.

Chapter VI

Icons for Rituals

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-samhita* (3, 5, 10) explains the anthropomorphic necessity of iconic representations:

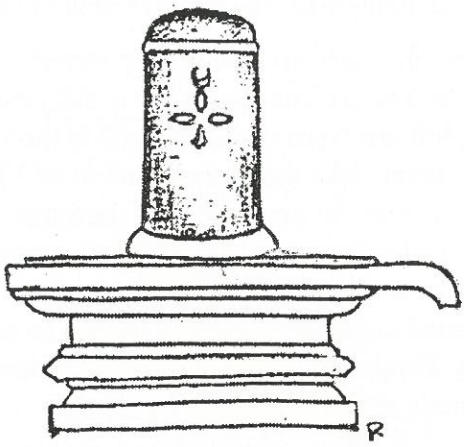
> "Worship can be done only for the deity with form, and not for an abstract idea. It is therefore that icons are made. They help concentration, contemplation, adoration and worship. The icon is a representation of the deity, and whatever is offered to the icon is really received by the deity. The devotee 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 Rama and Krishna, the sportive forms of Śiva, and the icons of goddesses like Lakshmi and Durga, 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, Gaṇesha (god with elephant's head) Nara-simha ('man-lion') Hayagrīva (human form with the horse's head), Pratyangira (goddess with the lion's head) and Kākamukhi (a yogini 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), Daksha (ram), and incarnations of Vishṇu 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, Yamuna and Kaveri), trees and plants (like Asvattha and Tulasi).

Vishnu 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 sālagrāma stone.



Śiva, on the other hand, is usually worshipped in the aniconic *linga* form, although he has about eighteen sportive forms (*līla-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 'Iinga' 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, Gauri-patta, 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 Vishṇu or Durga; 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 Vishṇu 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 Siva group, viz. Durgā, Gaṇapati, Kartikeya (known by several names such as Subrahmaṇya, Kumara and Skanda) and Nandi are, like the Vishṇu 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 (*śayana*). 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 (Dakshiṇa-mūrti, Vyasa, 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 Ranganatha or

Siva as Nataraja

Anantaśayana images). The portable icons meant for processional purposes 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 Vishṇu temples it is a common practice to have four such images in addition to the immobile and main icon in the sanctum (*pancabera* system). The normal temple- rituals involve bathing the deity (*snapana*); 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, sabha*). 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 Vishṇu 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 Jagannathapuri in Orissa or the earlier Varadaraja shrine at Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu), 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 (*sudha*) work, as are the main images in Śrīrangam (Ranganātha) and Kanchipuram (Ulaganda Perumal), both in Tamil Nadu. Normal bath in this case would damage the icon; special preparations (like *taila-kappu*

in Srirangam) 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 Palani (the original icon) and Tirucchengode (Ardha-nāri) in Tamil Nadu. 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-harana'*, 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 Vishnu shrines, however, it will be a replica of the main icon, or a conventional Vishnu 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 (*sibika*) 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 (*vṛshabha*), 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) angulas 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 iniconic representations, several *mandalas* or *yantras* (also called *cakras*) are

installed in many shrines for ceremonial worship. Such a device is essentially aniconic, but an intricate geometrical pattern predominates here. The basic form

Sri Chakra

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 Tantrik 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 *panca loha*. 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 Kanchipuram (Kāmakoti), Chidambaram (Sammelana-chakra), Kurtālam, Avadaiyar-Koyil, Jambukeśvara (Lalita), Śringeri (Sārada), Kollur (Mūkāmbika) and Tiruvidaimuḍudūr.

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 VII

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 Sankhya school to Indian thought. The entire universe (and every individual) is constituted of different combinations of these three guṇas, with one of them predominant in an object, or on an occasion.

Images that are seated having an aspect of tranquillity, and showing the *mudras* (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 mudras 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 tamasa group. The first group is generally benign and happy (*saumya*), while the last is fierce and destructive (*ugra* or *samhāra*).

Images of Vishnu as Para-Vāsudeva, Lakshmi Nārāyaṇa, Siva as Sadāśiva, Somaskanda and Dakshiṇa-mūrthi, Gaṇesa, Aiyappa (sasta), Lakshmi, Rajarajesvari and Sarasvati are illustrations of the

Ganesha in a standing posture ; bronze image

Sattvika type. *Māya-śāstra*, an iconographic manual, describes this type as characterized by eyes looking straight and serene, and by a peaceful aspect ("samadristis tu śānta cha); it brings quiet happiness to the devotee and helps in the dawning of wisdom in him.

Images of Vishṇu in the *sthānaka* (standing) posture like Trivikrama, Raja-gopala, Śrīnivāsa, Janārdana and Keśava; Śiva as Bhikshāṭana, Naṭarāja, Umālingana and Vishahara; composite images like Hari-Hara and Ardha-Nāri, images of Devī in the *sthānaka* posture; Gaṇeśa in a *dance stance*, Rama with Sīta are illustrations of the *rājasa* type.

Vishnu as Narasimha, Krishna as Kaliya-damana, Durga riding on the lion while killing the demon

Durga - bronze icon in the worship of the great musician - composer, Muttusvâmi Dikshitar

Mahisha, Skanda riding on 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 *sattvika* 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.

Any god may assume any of these aspects. Vishnu as Yogā-narasimha is really benign although his countenance is fierce. Śiva as Dakshina-murthy is actually destructive (he stamps on the apasmara-purusha with his right foot), although the general aspect is calm and meditative; likewise Naṭaraja. Durga 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 Vishṇu images, it is usual to notice four varieties (according to *Marichi-samhita*): *yoga* (meditative), *bhoga* (pleasant), *vīra* (valourous) and *abhichārika* (wicked). The bodily posture, and weapons

DURGA (from Lepakshi)

in the hands (Śankha 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 *abhicharika* when magicians and sorcerers resort to it in the course of their professional pursuits. However, the manuals suggest that the *yoga* type of Vishṇu images is to be installed on banks of rivers and in solitary spots; the *bhoga* type in the midst of human settlement; the vīra

Yoga-narasimha ; Vishnu in his 'man-lion' incarnation, seated in the yogic posture

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

According to *Archana-prakāśa* however, yoga, bhoga and vira 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 *tirthankara*) 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 Sanchi, Amarāvati and Nālaṇda. It was the Gāndhara 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 Mathura style corrected this trend, and emphasized the spirit of composure and wisdom that the Buddha image symbolized.

Buddha in
Mathura style

An image of great charm and significance is that of Prajñāparamitā, 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 Tantrik origin), *Sādhana-mala*, provides not only a description of this image but an account of its symbolism. She represents the highest knowledge that enlightens and liberates.

Buddha in
Gandhara style

Seated on the adamantine seat (*vajrāsana*), she is in a meditative posture, holding the Prajñāpāramita

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 Java, sculptured about the thirteenth century and now in the Leiden Museum, is wellknown.

Perhaps there was an independent trend among the Mathura and Gupta sculptors that crystallized the representation of the twenty-four tirthankara icons, with their human individuality lost in the general portrayal of the *kayotsarga* or *pratima-yoga* posture but the uniqueness of a *tirthankara* 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 tirthankaras but also for lesser saints like Bāhubali and Bharata. The Sravaṇa-belgola colossus of Bāhubali (called here Gommata), measuring 58 feet in height, is a well-known example of the *kevali*-ideal translated into a monolith. The contrasting imagery of the *tirthankara* as an emancipated saint and as a prince steeped in worldly riches (Jivanta-svami) is a favourite theme in Jaina iconography.

The *tirthankaras* are further distinguished by characteristic male and female guardian-angels (*Yakshas and Yakshiṇis*), who also figure prominently in iconography. Many divinities of the folk religion survive in the Jaina framework, like Brahma riding on the horse, Bhairavi the terrible goddess, and Śruta-devata 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 Tantrik prescription of *Yantras* is also involved in the Jaina approach to the worship of these divinities.

Siva in a dancing posture

Among the Śiva images, the most interesting and also the most bristling with symbolism is the dancer

Naṭaraja (Tāṇḍaveśvara), whose home is Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu. This aspect of Śiva is said to have been incarnated among the Dikshitar Brahmins of Tillai 3000, the original capital of which was Tiruvenkada (called *Adi- Tillai*). The Chola monarch Parantaka I (907-955 A.D.) was a great devotee of this aspect of Siva, and he built 'the sky-hall' *(dabhra sabha)*, covered with a roof of gold. It is this hall, in which Siva is supposed to have danced, that came to be called *Pon-ambalam* or Chidambaram. The divine dancer whose Tamil name is Adavallan, became the patron-god of the Chola Kings, and under their patronage numerous metallic icons of Naṭaraja were made and cast in Tamil Nadu. The most celebrated among such images are the ones of Tiruvalangadu, Kuram and Nallur. All these belong to the latter half of the ninth century.

The significance of the Chidambaram shrine of Nataraja is the representation of the 108 dance-modes (*karanas*) 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 Tanjore and on the eastern gopuram of Sarngapāṇi temple at Kumbhakonam. The dance is said to symbolize the five acts of God (*panchakṛtya*): creation, preservation, destruction, embodiment and release.

The Boy - Krishna represented in a dancing posture ; bronze icon

Inspired by the Naṭarāja 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. Krishna is often represented as dancing on the hood of the dragon Kaliya or dancing with a ball of butter in hand. There are old sculptures of dancing Ganeśa also.

Many of the hand and finger gestures (mudras), 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 ascendance 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 Vishṇu; trident, kettle-drum, and fire for Śiva; noose and goad for Ganeśa ; bow and arrow for Rāma; skull-mace (*khaṭvanga*) and long spear (*śūla*) for Durga; 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

VIRA - BHADRA (as Vinadhara)
(from Narasa-mangala)

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 Tantric prescriptions: *khaṭvanga, skull, bell, bījapura,* etc.), and some to the Puranic legends (antelope, conch, mace, thunderbolt, broad-sword 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-

आलम्बनस्य 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 (*adhiṣṭhana*) 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-ma* 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 तद्बोधकत्वं 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 Vīshṇu, white quartz for Śiva, metallic stone for Devi, crystal for Sun, and red stone for Ganeśa.

SIVA (as Nataraja)

Chapter VIII

Antiquity of Siva - Linga

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 *Siva-linga.*

The expression 'Iinga' 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 *bana-linga*) worshipped in homes usually take the form of unusual pebbles picked up from some sacred river (like Narmada), 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 *puranic* 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.

Linga from Indus culture

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 identification, but the sculptured lingam found at Gudimallam (Paraśu-rāmeśvara temple) in Andhra 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 Kushāna 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 Bhita 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 watervessel. The image has been inscribed in Brahmi 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 Sunga style which matured in Magadha around the same period.

The Kushāna 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 Gudimallam 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.

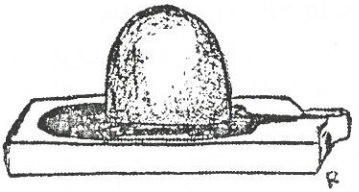
Patanjali (third century B.C.) is acquainted with Śiva icons, and not with the aniconic linga. Going back, we do not come across any reference to linga worship in the Vedic literature, although Śiva (Rudra) was a recognized divinity even in *Rigveda*. And we have the

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 *linga* as his symbol may have come into vogue in the subsequent period.

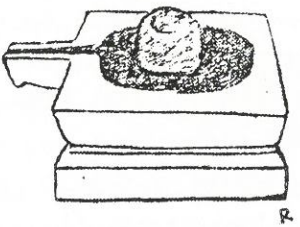
Śiva is said to have 'manifest' (*vyakta*) or iconic, 'unmanifest' (*avyakta*) or abstract, and 'both manifest and unmanifest' or aniconic (*vyaktāvyakta*) forms. The *linga* illustrates the third form: it is manifest and is symbolic of divine presence, but devoid of details that could be regarded as 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 Gauripatta*), 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



Linga

Asvatthama as a golden altar (*vedi*) with fire emanating from it. The *linga*-shaft stands for the fire element, and the altar is the earth element (mṛnmayam sthaṇḍilam, as suggested in the episode of the hunter and Arjuna in the '*Vanaparvan*' section of the epic). An iconographic and Tantrik text, Ajitāgama, describes *linga* as a "pillar of light" (*jyotih stambha*), and explains it as the fire in which all beings disappear (*li*) and from which all beings burst forth as sparks from fire (*ga*).



Linga with prominent
yoni - pedestal

The *linga* has three distinct parts. The top one third of the shaft is visible, and this is the linga proper that is worshipped. It is called the Śiva-aspect (*Rudrabhāga 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 Vishṇu-aspect (*Vishṇu-bhāga*). The bottom one-third goes into the structure known as *Nandyavarta,* accommodated inside the earth. This is the Brahma aspect, regarded as 'neuter'. Iconographical prescription recommends the top portion to be round (cylindrical). the middle eight-sided, and the bottom squarish (*Ajitāgama*).

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

Making a *linga* under a cubit is not recommended. The lowest kinds of *lingas* 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, jaggery, 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 *Aparajita-priccha*).

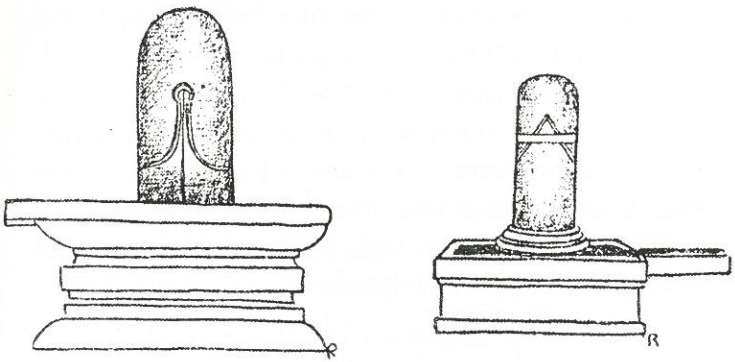
Wooden *lingas* are likewise distinguished by the type of wood used, and they are of eight kinds. There is a prohibition against making an wooden linga under sixteen inches in height.

While these are man-made *lingas*, the natural *lingas* are said to be obtained in sacred spots like Śrī-śaila Amara-kaṇṭaka and Narmada river-bed. These are called 'bana-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 (*chatra*) 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, Vishnu and Brahma) are: 9-8-7 in the 'egg' type; $8^1/_2$-8-$7^3/_4$ in the 'gourd' type; 8-8-8 in the 'umbrella' type; and $7^1/_2$ 8-$8^1/_2$ in the 'half-moon' type.

On the Śiva portion of the *linga* (the visible shaft) may be carved flattened vertical strips(*dharas*), 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 blackmagic (*Isana-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 in 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 'Iakshaṇoddhāra' or 'brahma-sūtra'. The rule is that the Śiva-part of the linga is divided into three parts, only the lower two parts being used for such marking.



Markings on the linga

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 Silpa-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 Ganga on his head (Gangādhara), teaching the great sages (Dakshiṇa-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 Naṭaraja, Ardha-nāri (half male and half female), Hari-Hara (composite Vishṇu-Śiva), Kalyāṇasundara (while wedding Pārvatī) and Bhikshāṭana (on his begging round). Everyone of these iconic representations has a Puranic 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 glorious.

Chapter IX

The Vishnu Images

Vishṇu 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. We will deal with the five-fold forms of Vishnu that developed incidental to the *Vyūha* theory, in a future volume, when we deal with the Pancharātra-Āgama. Pāṇini and Patanjali (several centuries before Christ) were acquainted with the iconic worship of Vāsudeva and Sankarshaṇa (later Balarāma and in a variant form Subrahmanya, the Snake-deity). The heroes of the Vrshṇi clan were being worshipped in temples (*vāṭikas*) and in the shape of icons (*pratima*).

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 (*chaturbhuji*) Bhagavan" of that date, found in the Burhikhar village in Bilaspur (Madhya-Pradesh). The image carries discus and mace in its two extra hands Curiously,

however, the normal hands assume the *anjali* (suppli cation) posture, suggesting that the icon may be that of an attendant of Vishṇu. It is usual for the attendant of a deity to be distinguished by the emblems and weapons of the deity itself. The worship of Vishṇu seems to have been popular with the Hellenistic satraps and the early Gupta kings.

The iconography of Krishṇa as a variant of Vishṇu also dates back to a distant past. Krishṇa's relation with Indra (Vedic hero) has been mentioned even in *Rigveda* (8,96, 13-5). *Ghata jātaka* knows him as a prince of Mathura. Pāṇini suggests his association with the Pāṇḍava hero Arjuna. Patañjali refers to him

The Boy Krishna

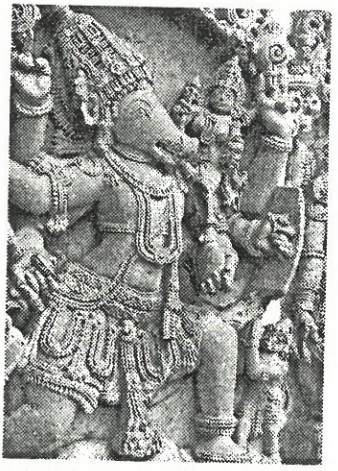
as "revered". Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* (14,3) recommends the worship of Krishṇa before collecting medicinal herbs.

Harivamśa makes the tribal goddess Ekanamsa (a prototype of the later Devi image) a sister to Krishṇa and Balarāma. The worship of the three (Ekanamsa as Subhadra) has survived to this day in the famous Jagannatha temple at Puri (Orissa). The belief that all three of these deities, especially Krishna-Vasudeva, are human incarnations of Vishṇu 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 Vishṇu.

Rūpamanda enumerates as many as 24 images of Vishṇu, of which man-boar (*nara-varāha*) is one; all the others are completely human or celestial. Bayaśīrsha-samhita, however, speaks of the 'man-fish' (*nṛi-matsya*), 'man-tortoise' (*nṛi-kūrma*) and 'man-lion' (*nṛi-simha*) forms in addition to the emanations of Vishṇu.

The ten popular incarnations (avatāras) frequently represented in icons presuppose specific needs of devotees, and among them Rāma, Krishṇa, Paraśurāma, Vāmana and Buddha (or Balarāma) are entirely human; Matsya (Fish), Kurma (Tortoise), Varaha (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.



Vishnu in his incarnation as Varaha

Besides these ten, Vishṇu has other well-known iconic representations, such as Haya-grīva (Horseheaded), Dhanvantari (The First Physician), Dattātreya (composite sage, incorporating Brahma, Vishṇu and Śiva) and Vyāsa (the sage who compiled

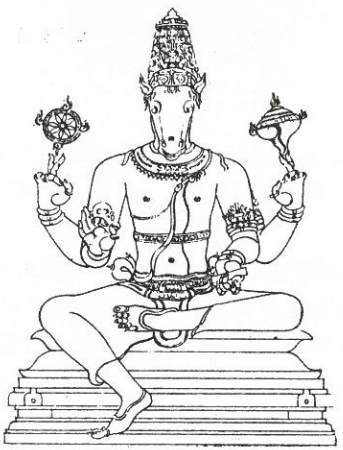
the Veda). *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* lists twenty-two iconic forms of Vishṇu, while *Agni-purāṇa* twenty-four. And some of them have several variations, like Narasimha having as many as seventy four according to *Vihagendrasamhita*, 4,7), Varāha five, and Krishna eight.

Narasimha, seated alone (Kevala) in an unusual yogic posture

Narasimha is an interesting icon. The occasion for this incarnation was to protect the young devotee Prahlāda, and to kill his wicked father Hiraṇya-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 (*jvāla*), 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-Samhita* (4, 76), and a composite figure of *Varāha-Narasimha* (*Parāśara-Samhita*, 30, 21).

The iconic yantra of Vishṇu'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 (Padma-Samhita, 31, 257).



HAYAGRIVA

Narasimha, the incarnation of Vishnu, 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 Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa is the rarer of the two, but we have a drawing of it from the Mysore Court, done over a hundred years ago.

ŚARABHA

It is usual for the Vishnu icons to be associated with Lakshmī or her incarnation (as Sītā with Rāma,

and Rukmiṇi with Krishṇa). Independent representation of Lakshmī (Śri or Sirima-devata) who is a Vedic goddess, can be found in the relief-sculptures of Barhut and Sanchi 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 Lakshmī with many arms, familiarly known as *ashṭa-lakshmī*, which are independent of Vishṇu.

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

It may be recalled that in the Śiva-linga, the middle 'Female' part (called yoni or Gauri-patta, which receives the water poured over the linga in the cere monial bath given to it) is known in texts as Vishṇu's part. We have other references that indicate the feminīne 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. Puranic legends make her Vishṇu's sister; Krishṇa's association with the tribal goddess Ekanamśa (Bhadra or Subhadra) 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 'Vaishṇavi-śakti', the energetic aspect of Vishṇu.

Chapter X

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, Vaishṇava, 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 'agamas' is stronger in South Indian temples than in their North Indian counterparts, but among the more celebrated temples in the North (like Varanasi, Dwaraka, Puri Jagannath, Kamakhya, Badari, 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, rangamaṇḍapa,* or *mukha-maṇṭapa.* 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 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 gatherions 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-Jagannath) 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 *purohits*

(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 *pandits* (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 these that qualify 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 fervor 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 paid for it as a 'hireling' *(bhrtakādhyāpaka)*. This prejudice has resulted in relatively well-defined, closed, endogamous, and distinct classes of temple-priests of Śaiva, Vaishṇava and Śākta persuasions. 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 ('pratimā svalpa-buddhīnām'). This opinion is quoted in the *Smrti* 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 rupam vinā devo dhyātum kenāpi śakyate', *Vishṇu-samhitā*, 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 *(Paramasamhitā,* 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, 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 worlds 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.

Chapter XI

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 *(paricharāka).* They are not rites proper. and so do not require initiation. But in temples where the rule of custom 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 *(pādya). :* (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 *(uśira),* 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, asvattha, madhuka, plaksha, pāṭala* and *jambū*. Water from the tender cocoanut *(nālikera)* is also employed. A preparation known as 'panchāmrta', consisting of an amalgum of fruits like plantains 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 *(panchagavya)*: 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 *(gomaya,* 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.

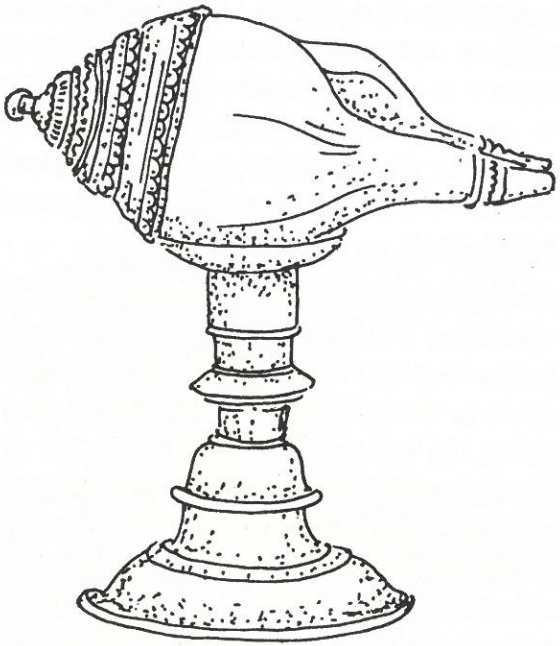
It is usual in the temples to keep five large vessels to contain water for the above mentioned purposes, arranged on a large circular plate made of gold, silver or copper, standing on a tripod. The water for oblation *(arghya)* is placed on the South-East corner, the water for washing the feet *(pādya)* 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 *tulas ī* 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. A 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 facilities 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 *(ghaṇṭa)* 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 Vishṇu. Called 'Pāncha-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 Sarasvati in its front portion.

Vishṇu himself is said to be represented in conch. Conches are called in Sanskrit 'śankha', which



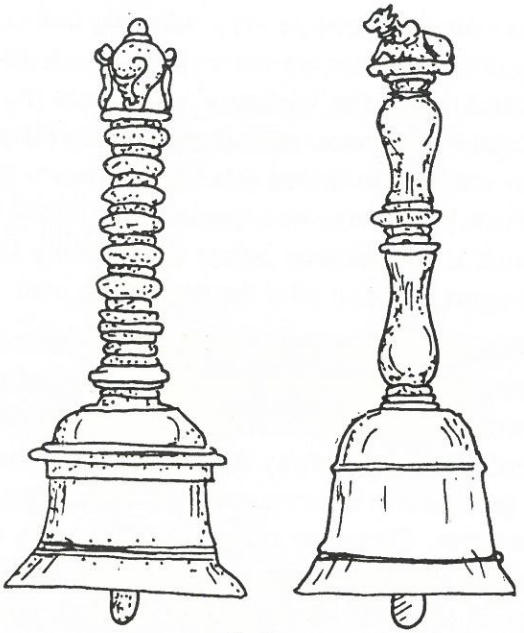
Conch

expression 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' *(dakshiṇāvarta).* 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 *(ghaṇṭa)* 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 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,

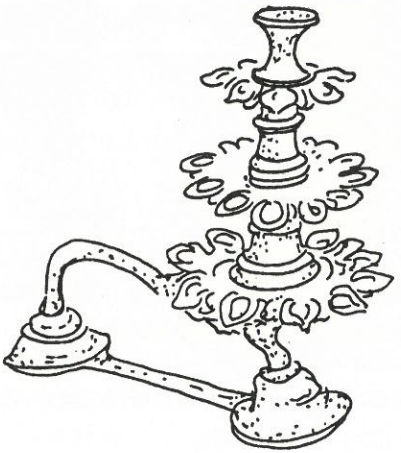
Sarasvati ; the handle signifies the vital principle *(prāṇa-śakti)* in the form of Hanumān, Garukula, Nandi or Chakra. The bell without a handle in one of these forms is forbidden to be used in rituals, as it would bring about misfortune.



Bells

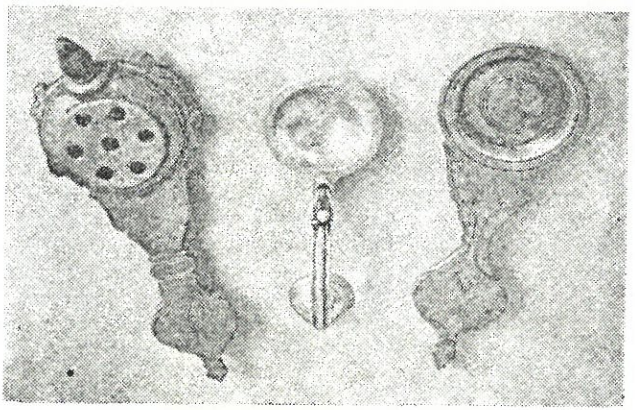
Waving of light before the image is a ritual known as 'dīpa', 'nirājana', 'ārati' or 'ārātrika'. It is done towards the close of the worship sequences. For this purpose either camphor *(karpūra)* is used or a set of

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 *(ghaṇta),* blowing of the conch *(śankha),* or beating of a flat metallic instrument known as 'jaya-ghaṇta'. Hymns of praise are also recited while this is done.

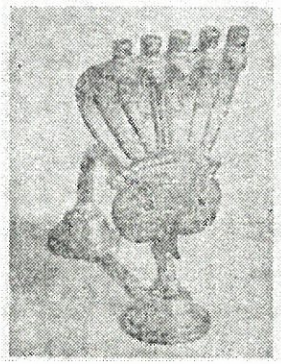


Gopura Arati

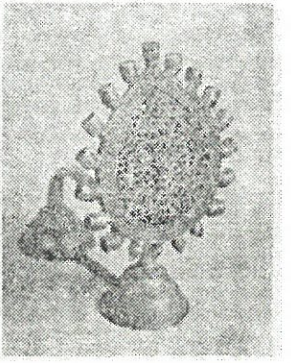
This ritual tends to assume considerable importance, as it is always done before the gathering of devotees. It is considered meritorious for the lay folk to participate in this ritual sequence. And therefore the ritual is elaborately gone through. Several rounds of waving the lights are resorted to. 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



Halagarati, Dhuparati and Kumarati



Sesharati



Panchayudha arati

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 *'sāttvika'* (or the 'superior') variety includes flowers like *śvetārka* (white calotropis), *nandyāvarta, droṇa* (Leucas linifolia). *śveta-padma* (white lotus), *jāti* (jasmine), *mandāra* (coral tree, Erythrina 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 *bṛhati* (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 (varjjita), like the blossom of the cotton plant *(kārpāsa),* Pandanuas odoratissimus *(ketakī),* Saccharum spontaneum *(kāsa.* a variety of grass), china rose *(japā)*, a variety of lotus *(srī-parṇi,* Gmelina Arborea), Terminalia Bellerica *(vibhītaka)* and

Pentapetes Phoeniciea *(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,* 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 hectagonal seat called *vimala* for offering food *(naivedya* or *bhojana)*, and a triangular seat called *anantāsana* for relaxation or recreation *(vinoda)*. Details of the pentad *(panchāsana)* are given in texts like *Chandra-jnānāgama* 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 *(prthivī)*, respectively.

After food is offered to the deity *(naivedya)*, it is customary to present *tāmbula* 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 *pānīya)* is available for offering, the *tāmbūla* is offered along with a cocoanut 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 *(vedi* or *sthaṇḍila)* or a fire-pit *(homa-kuṇḍa),* 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 *(āhutidravya).* 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.

Chapter XII

Daily Ritual

The word *pūjā* (meaning 'worship') signifies the fulfilment of the prescribed rituals (pūryante sarva-karmāṇi) 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-bhūshaṇe),* (8) offering a fresh sacred thread *(yajnopavīta),* (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 *(pradakshiṇa),* 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 *(ābharaṇa),* decorations *(alankāra),* holding a mirror *(darpaṇa),* applying unguents *(anulepana),* fanning with a fly-

whisk *(chāmara-vyajana),* presenting dance and music *(nartana, gīta-vādya),* 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 tutellary 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 *(prātah),* noon *(mādhyandina)* and evening *(sāyam).* 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 'shaṭ-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 p.m) also is conducted.

The Vaikhānasa texts provide for worship six times, whereas the Śaiva texts insist on the 'pradosha-pujā' as the sixth, before the 'ardha-yāma pūjā', is conducted. The Pancha-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 *aruṇodaya)* is said to increase the cattle-wealth and progeny in the community; in the morning *(prabhāta* or *prātah)* to promote religious fervour among the people; at noon, secure prosperity of the kingdom; during afternoon, 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: The first (1) is inviting the represented divinity to partake in the ritual *(āvāhana).* The second (2) 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 agamic prescriptions are always 'alive' and fit for worship without formal 'infusion of life-force' *(prāṇa-pratishthā).* However, the ritual detail of *sthapana* 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 Vaikhānasa, Pancharātra, 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 Vaikhānasa 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 throwaway 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 *pushpanyasa)* .

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-srishṭi-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 *(jīvātma).* 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 there by 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-ārādhanā-dhikāra-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 Vishṇu (Satya, Purusha, Achyuta, Aniruddha and Vishṇu), 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 'Purusha-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 *(jihvāśodhana)* 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 *(ābharaṇa),* 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 Brahma, 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 'pañchāmṛtasnāna' 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 *(narikela-jala* or *phalodaka)* are given in order, reciting an appropriate vedic hymn for each article. Finally, a 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, Vishṇu 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, followed by hymnal offerings *(mantra-pushpa),* recital of laudatory verses *(stotra),* seeking pardon for the lapses *(kshamāpaṇa),* circumambulations *(pradakshiṇa)* 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, vādya),* dance *(nṛtta)* and recitals from the vedic literature, poetical works, purāṇic narratives, *kalpa-sūtras* and *smṛti-texts.*

Chapter XIII

Festivals

The Samskrit word for festival is 'utsava'. Derived from the root 'su' (meaning 'generating', 'producing'), and with the prefix 'ut' (meaning 'up', 'rising', 'excitement'), the word signifies an event that generates happiness or excitement ('utsūte harsham'). 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 *Uttarakāraṇāgama* (4, 1) takes 'ut' in the sense of wisdom ('jnānam') and 'sava' in the sense of what causes all benefit ('savah kalyāṇa-kāraṇam). *Purushottama samhitā* (32, 2), however, means by 'ut' what *is* excellent ('utkṛṣhṭa-vachanam'), and by 'sava' sacrifice *('yajna'). Nāradīya-samhitā* (18) and *Īśvara-samhitā* (10, 3) give yet another interpretation : 'ut'

means "obstacles", "impediments", ('vighṇan') and 'sava' is "throwing out" ('udgatah'). 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 calender events with astronomical significance *(e.g.* Yugādi, Sankrānti, Oṇam, Chittirai, Āḍi, Diwali, Vasantha-paṇchami, Śrāvani, Vaiśākhi etc.), or in honour of a divinity *(e.g.* Rāma-navami, Krishna-jaṇmāsṭami, Mahā-śiva-rātri, Durgā-pūjā, Vara-

Lakshmi vratam, Narasimha-jayanti, Nāgapañchami, Ganeśa-chaturthi, Skanda-shashṭi etc.) or for participation in a community activity *(e.g.* Rakshā-bandhana, Dasarā, Vanayātrā, Kaveri-mūla, Guru-pūrṇima 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.* Krishṇa-janmāshṭami in a Krishṇa temple, Maha-śiva-rātri in a Śiva temple, Ganeśa-chauti in a Ganeśa temple). Temples have their own festivals, which are meant to 'contribute to the alround prosperity of the people as well as the nation' ('prājanām api rāshṭrasya sarvābhyudaya-sādhakam', *Purushottama-samhita,* 23, 6), to 'undo the evil effects of calamities, famine and terrible portents ('dur, bhiksha-durnimittādi-ghorāṇām 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 subham', *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 ('rājnām 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 *(Srī-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 lighning, 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 causes 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-sāncharyā*, 20, 9-18) ; and (3) kāmya (to accomplish the cherished goals of the people), festivals conducted to commemmorate the building of the temple or the installation of the main icon, or when desired by the people (Nāradīya-samhitā, 18, 6 ; Īśvara-samhitā10, 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 misra or mixed type. Some texts, however, describe the nitya festivals as sāttvika', kāmya as 'rajāsa' 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 'pañchabera'. 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 Vaisṇava 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 'chandra' *(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

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are texts which extend the limit to 21 days *(e.g., Nāradīya-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 *(vijaya),* 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'). *Nārayanasamhitā* (44) mentions that one-day festivals please Brahma, three-day festivals Śiva, seven-day festivals Lakshmi, and nine-day festivals Vishṇu.

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) 'māngalya' ('auspicious', involving whatever rituals are preferred by the donor, *yajamāna).*

Festivals are further classified according to how they begin *(utsavārambha).* Texts like *Parameśvara-samhita* (16, 28-29) and *Nāradīya-samhitā* (18, 7-8) make a threefold 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 (sarvesham mokshadām'), resulting in enjoyment of heaven (svargabhoga-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 *(paushṭika)* 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 asupicious day for the 'tirtha' is first to be determined (Purushottama-samhitā, 23 'niśchitya tīrtha-divasam yāga-karma samārabhet' ; Pūrva-kāraṇagama, 141, 'tirtham ādau vinishitya').

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' (tirtha-yātrā), according to Nāradīya-samhitā (18, 17). The flag or banner on which the figure of Indra (the chieftain of the gods), of Garuḍa (the carrier of Vishṇu), or of Vṛshabha (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 śimba, Dolichos uniflorus or Kaulattha) are sown in twelve earthern 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 'churṇotsava', 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 *(śuddhasnāna)* or the beating of the drum *(bheri-tāḍana* or *bherika-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 gaiety and splendour *(mahotsava* or *ratha-yātrā),* carrying of icons ceremonially to the tank or river for a 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 *(dakshiṇa-sampradāna),* and finally taking down the flag ceremonially *(dhvajāvarohaṇa),* marking the conclusion of the festival *(Vishvaksena-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 (vighṇa-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, lakshmiprīti-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 gotup 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 *(chandramaṇḍala),* solar orb *(sūrya-maṇḍala),* lion *(simha),* horse *(aśva),* elephant *(gaja),* swan *(hamsa),* snake *(ananta* or *śesha),* parrot *(śuka),* flower-pavilion *(pushpa-pīṭha),* and the mountain Meru and the wish-fulfilling tree *(kalpa-vṛksha).* In Śaiva temples bull *(vṛshabha),* and in Vaisnava 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-maṇṭapa).*

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 samhīta,* 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). Vāsishtha-samhita,* 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, karaḍige, segaṇḍi. kaī-maṇi, paraī, śankham, yāl, kulal, 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, gaity 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 welding 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 constellastion 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 the 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 Tirumalaī hills in Andra 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 'kalaśam', 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 of 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.

Chapter XIV

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 *(nirguṇa),* 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, Tantrik and Mixed *(miśra)* types. It is unlikely that temples or icons were envisaged in the Vedic culture. 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 Tantrik 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 Tantrik approach. But in actual practice, the two approaches coalesced, so that in the temple, icons and fire together received worship; *archa* 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 identical. 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 *(murti),* 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 'upacharas' (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-devobhava').

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 festive 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 ritual' 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-*

pratishthā (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 one's 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 *mudras.* 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 *(avaguñṭhita),* 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' ('Ehyehi, 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) *mātṛkā-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 aspect 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 Tantrik, 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 sect to which one belongs. The Vaishṇavas adopt what is known as the 'Keśavādi-nyāsa', while the Śaivas follow 'Śrīkaṇṭhādi-nyāsa' and the Śaktas 'Kalā-nyāsa'. The third form is largely Vedic, although Tantrik 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.

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