

THE TEMPLE RITUALS

Prof S.K.Ramachandra Rao



THE TEMPLE RITUALS AND FESTIVALS

Vidyalkara

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This Book is Dedicated to

Vidvan **Dr. N. S. ANANTHARANGACHAR**

to whom I am indebted for his
sustained interest in my work.

P R E F A C E

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 Āgama 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.

I am grateful to Sri G. K. Ananthram, the Publisher, for enabling me to write this book, as others in the Series, by his manifold goodness and help in various ways.

S. K. Ramachandra Rao

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THE TEMPLE RITUALS

I

WORSHIP IN TEMPLES

The temple is distinguished from a household shrine not only in its structure and organization but also in its rituals and forms of worship. The worship manuals known as 'āgamas' lay down procedural details for worship in a temple, while worship in the household shrine is largely ruled by family traditions and customs.

Worship in the household shrine is by necessity a simple ritual of comparatively short duration, conducted mostly but once a day (in the morning at no fixed time). Generally, the head of the family or some older member of the household would attend to it; and he does it not only for himself but on behalf of all the members of the household. Actual participation in the worship, however, is not obligatory for the other members. Even when the ritual tends to be elaborate, there would be little of ostentation and less of formality.

Worship in a temple is characteristically elaborate, and is conducted three, five or six times during twenty-four hours. In many of the more famous temples, worship rituals are almost continuous during the day and stretch far into the night. And the ritual sequences are meant to attract

and impress crowds of devotees. The priests who officiate in temples carry out the worship not for their own sake but for the sake of the public, the state and for the welfare of all humanity (so at least the scriptures say). In fact, the priest employed in a temple is expected to finish his own household worship before he comes to the temple.

Worship in the household shrine is largely guided by family traditions and customs rather than by set rules, although there tends to be some uniformity in the rituals owing to belongingness to religious groups. But the worship-manuals known as 'āgamas' describe procedural details for worship in a temple both elaborately and with precision. They have done it so consistently and for so long that worship in the temples has acquired considerable uniformity despite sectarian affiliations (like Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Śākta).

While it is true that temples in the South differ from the temples in the North both with regard to their structures and to their ritual details, closer inquiry would reveal that these differences are more apparent than real, more superficial than deep. It may appear at first glance that the hold of the 'āgamas' is stronger in South Indian temples than in their North Indian counterparts, but among the more celebrated temples in the North (like 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.

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 'agamas' 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 gatherings of devotees on occasions, and also to house the images, vessels, vehicles, clothes, adornments



Temple procession going round the village

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.

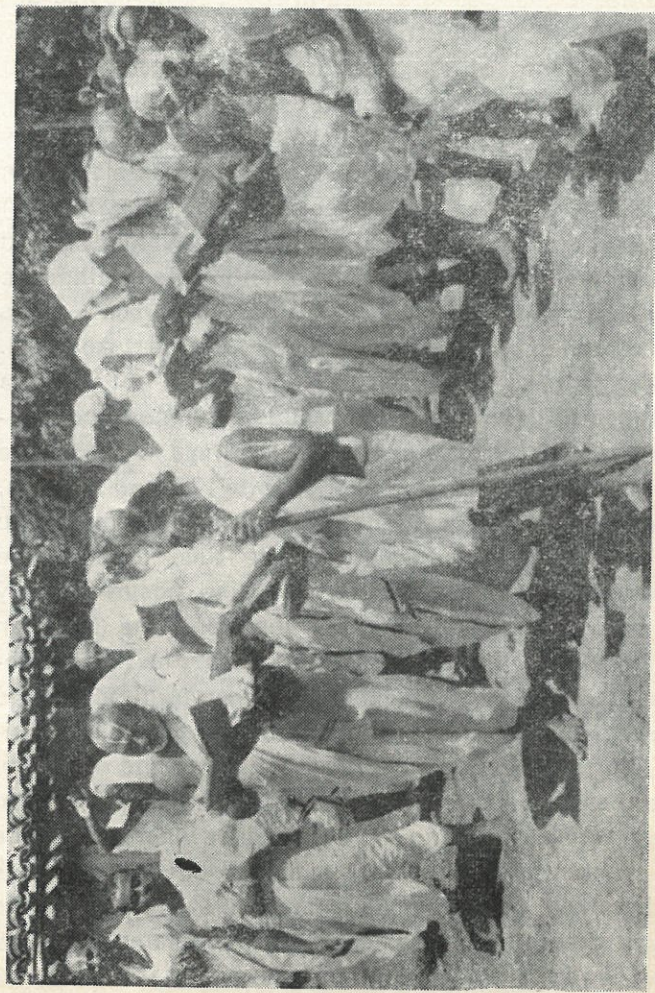
The worship in a temple is, therefore, multi-dimensional. It is not so much spiritual as religious, and religious phenomena are a complex of social, economic, recreational and educational processes. A temple in its intent comprehends all these aspects. Activities in the temple, especially during festivals, 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 fervour in public is denounced in the scriptures as vulgar. For still another, worship which involves remuneration or recompense is in reality a business transaction, and fails to bring about spiritual benefits. For yet another, all acts of worship can only be personal; scriptures do not commend collective worship.

Thus there is a prejudice among the orthodox against temple-priests, in fact against all professional priests. Manu denounces even a learned brahmin who teaches sacred texts and gets paid for it as a 'hireling' (*bhṛtakādhyāpaka*). This prejudice has resulted in relatively well-defined, closed, endogamous, and distinct classes of temple-priests of Saiva, Vaishnava and Sakta persuasions. They have been for generations custodians of the scriptural lore concerning worship in temples. And they have been responsible for the



Learned Brahmins reciting Veda, going behind the deity in a procession ; they are not priests in the temple

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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 ('muninām hr̥di 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 *Smṛti* ascribed to the great Aparārka.

While this is so, the 'āgama' texts point out that it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for one to contemplate on the divinity without conceptualizing a form ('na chārūpam vinā devo dhyātum kenāpi śakyate', *Vishṇu-saṃhitā*, 29, 51). It is in the very nature of mind to conjure up images. If the mind is forbidden to do this, it may lapse into drowsiness or get withered up. Mind has necessarily to be employed in worship, and therefore one finds an image of God a great advantage. Another text (*Parama-saṃhitā*, 3, 5-10) suggests that a human form for God is very helpful for the devotee to meditate on the divine attributes, to offer prayers, to approach with love and devotion.

It is therefore that the temples contain images of God in human form, excepting the Siva 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.

II

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 (*parichāra*). 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 (*pādyā*) ; (2) water offered for sipping or rinsing the mouth (*āchamana*) ; (3) water offered as oblation (*arghya*) ; and (4) water for bathing the image (*snāna*). Scriptural texts insist that water used for different functions must be differently got up. The water for washing the feet is mixed with four substances, viz., khus khus (*uśīra*), sandal-wood pieces (*chandana*), blades of *durvā*-grass and white-mustard (*siddha*). Water for sipping is mixed with six articles, viz., cardamom (*elā*), cloves (*lavanga*), camphor (*karpūra*), the fruit called *jambū*, jasmine (*jāti*) and the fruit called *priyangu*. Water for oblation must have eight substances put in it: gingelly (*tila*), rice (*vrihi*), tips of the *kuśa*-grass, milk, wheat, winnowed grains (*taṇḍula*), mustard (*sarshapa*), and water from the conch.

Water for ceremonial bath is elaborately prepared with numerous herbs, spices, flowers, grains and unguents. The bath is also given by a herbal decoction (*kashāya*) made by the barks of seven trees : *palāśa*, *udumbara*, *aśvattha*, *madhuka*, *plaksha*, *pātala* and *jambū*. Water from the tender cocoanut (*nālikera*) is also employed. A preparation known as 'panchāmṛta', 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 Nāṭa and productive of prosperity) and cow's refuse (*go-maya*, representing Arka or Sun, and beneficial in warding off diseases). This bath is given on astrologically significant days (like *ayana*, *vishuva*), or during solar or lunar eclipse, or during any auspicious occasion. There is a standard method of preparing this concoction : the cow's refuse is first mixed with cow's urine, and then this is put in clarified butter, which in turn is mixed with curds, and finally the whole is put into milk.

It is usual in the temples to keep five large vessels to contain water for the above mentioned purposes, arranged on a large circular plate made of gold, silver or copper, standing on a tripod. The water for oblation (*arghya*) is placed on the South-East corner, the water for washing the feet (*pādya*) on the South-West, the water for sipping (*āchamanīya*) on the North-West, and the water for bath (*snānīya*) on the North-East. In the centre is kept the vessel containing water for general purposes (*sarvārtha-toya*). This will contain only a few *tulasī* leaves, some flowers, gingelly seeds and sandal paste.

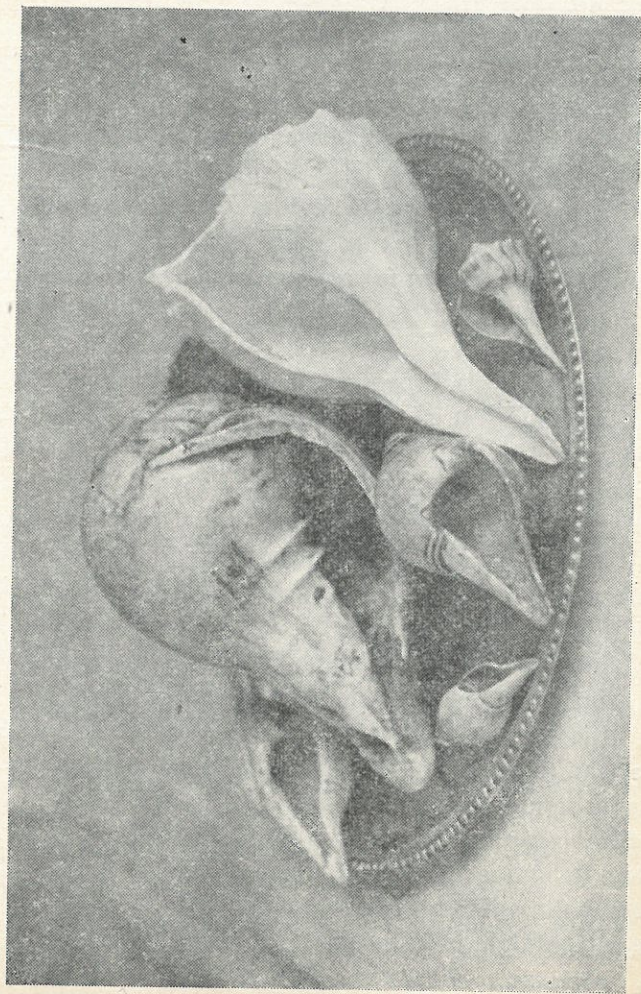
The tripod (wooden) on which these vessels are kept, is placed in front of the image in the sanctum, close to where the priest sits and offers worship. There are also prescriptions about the seat and posture used by the priest while worshipping and what direction he should face while sitting. An wooden plank (*dārvāsana*) is said to be the best seat, for it is conducive to prosperity. Sitting on a piece of cloth spread on the floor is health-giving ; woollen blanket used

as a seat removes sorrow; and sitting on the deer-skin 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 (*ghaṇṭā*) and utensils for waving lights before the image (*ārati* or *āratrikā*) are important. The conch is used in bathing the image, and for sanctifying the articles of worship as well as the worshipper himself. Legends describe that the ancestral conch emerged from the ocean of milk when it was churned by the gods and demons for the sake of ambrosia, and that it was adored by all the gods and received by the hand of Viṣṇu. Called 'Pāṇcha-janya', it is said to be a divinity in its own right. Sun and Moon are said to reside in it; Varuṇa, the god of waters, is said to abide in the middle portion; Prajāpati, the first born and the progenitor of all beings in its tail portion; and the twin river-goddesses Gangā and Sarasvatī in its front portion.

Viṣṇu himself is said to be represented in conch.

Conches are called in Sanskrit 'śamkha', which 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

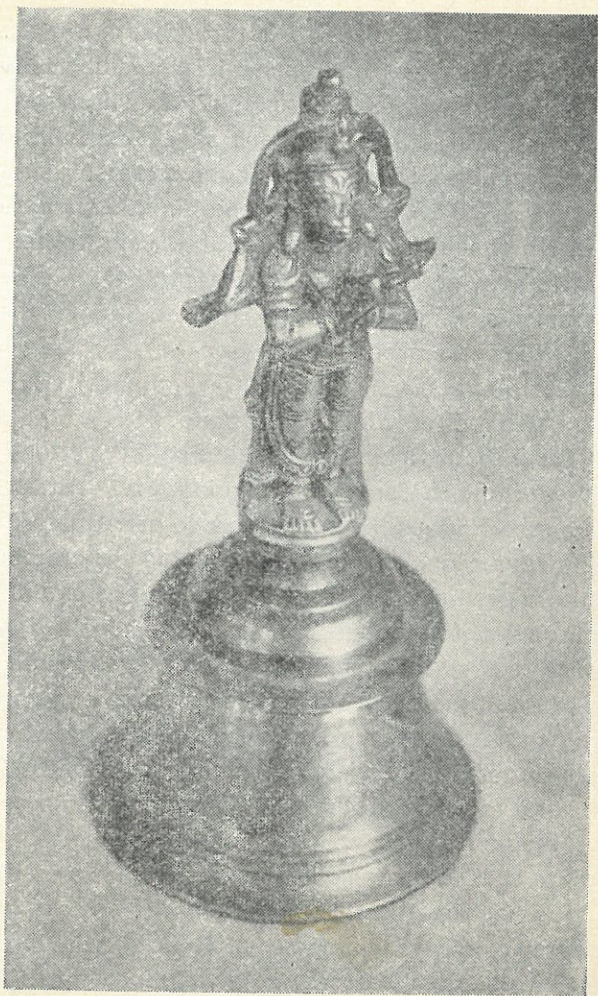


Conches—the left-inclining and the right-inclining ones. The latter are rare and precious

into brahmin, kshatriya, vaiśya and śūdra varieties. But the most significant is the grouping into 'left-inclining' (*vāmāvarta*) and the 'right-inclining' (*dakṣiṇāvarta*). The latter are regarded as very valuable and sacred. The 'superior' conches are said to be got from the river Tāmraparṇī, while the 'ordinary' ones from the river Gangā, and the 'inferior' ones from the river Narmadā. Conches are held so sacred that they are never placed on the floor, but always on a special stand meant for it. The conch is worshipped before the worship for the image begins and also after the worship is over.

The bell (*ghaṇṭā*) is an other indispensable article in ritualistic worship. It is sounded even before the actual worship commences, in order to invite the gods to assemble and 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 *abhiśheka*), and the offering of food (*naivedya*). The body of the bell is said to represent the divinity of time, viz., Ananta, and the 'tongue' the goddess of speech, Sarasvati; the handle signifies the vital principle (*prāṇa-śakti*) in the form of Hanumān, Garuḍa, Nandi or Chakra. The bell without a handle in one of these forms is forbidden to be used in rituals, as it would bring about misfortune.

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

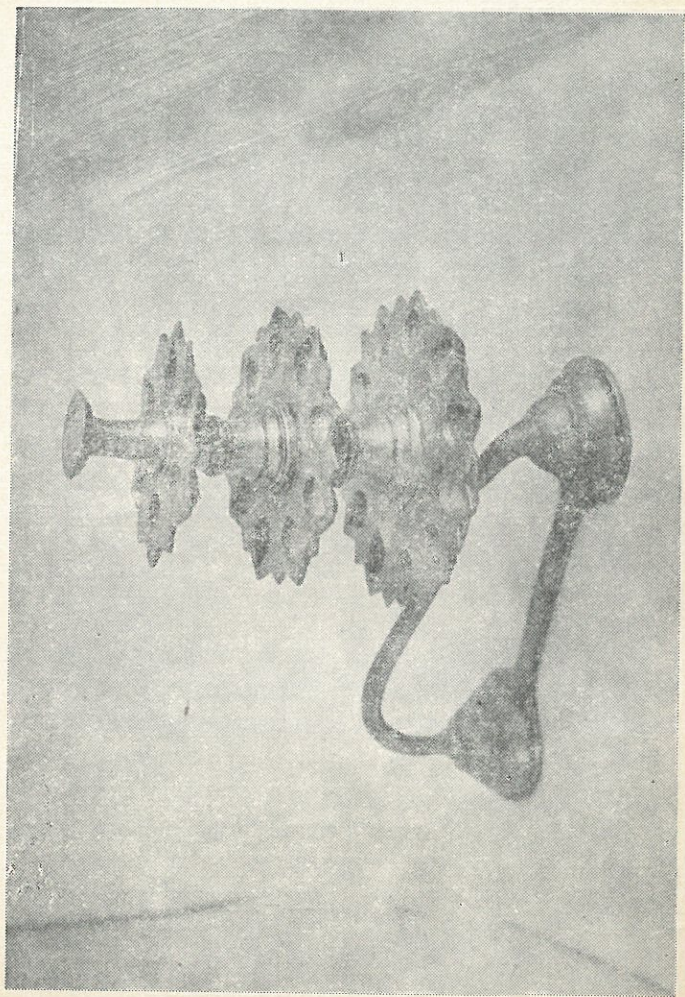


Bell used in worship of Vaishnavite deities. Hanuman is represented on the handle

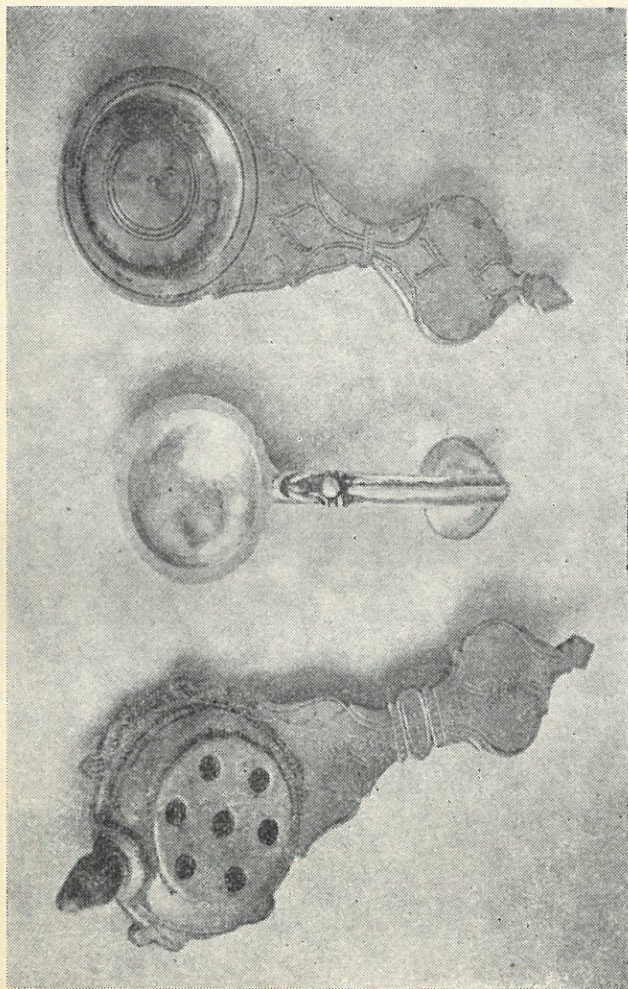
cotton wicks dipped in clarified butter (ghee) or in oil. The worshipper who waves the light during worship as also the devotee who witnesses this procedure will be said to conquer the dark worlds (*viz.*, ignorance) and burn up all evil done in this life. Even if the ritual of worship has been deficient 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 (*ghaṇṭa*), blowing of the conch (*śankha*), or beating of a flat metallic instrument known as 'jaya-ghaṇṭa'. Hymns of praise are also recited while this is done.

This ritual tends to assume considerable importance, as it is always done before the gathering of devotees. It is considered meritorious for the lay folk to participate in this ritual sequence. And therefore the ritual is elaborately gone through. Several rounds of waving the lights are resorted to. And different kinds of implements made in silver or bell-metal are used for this purpose, in order to enhance the effect and make the occasion very impressive. Among such implements are those that are shaped like a water-pot (*kumbha*), a tortoise (*kūrma*), a serpent with seven hoods (*nāga*), or a tower with the wick-containers arranged in a tapering manner (*gopura*). Commonly, however, a large round plate is used for the purpose ; sometimes a small plate with a long and ornamental handle is used.

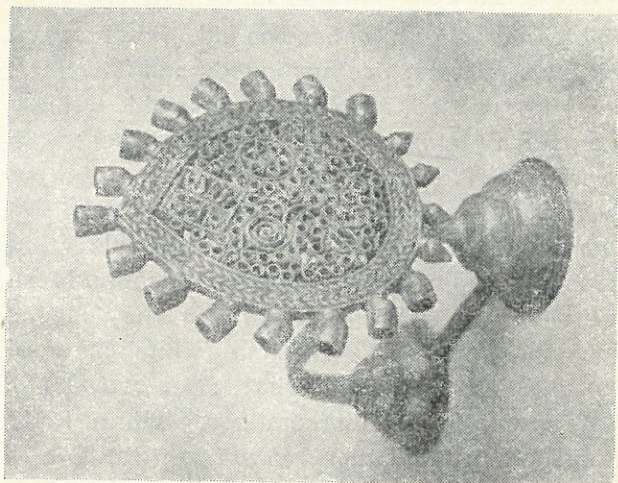
Flowers constitute an important article of worship. The image in the sanctum is decorated with garlands of flowers, and flowers (unstrewn) are required for several sequences in the worship. The texts contain prescriptions about the flowers that may be used in rituals. In general, flowers with



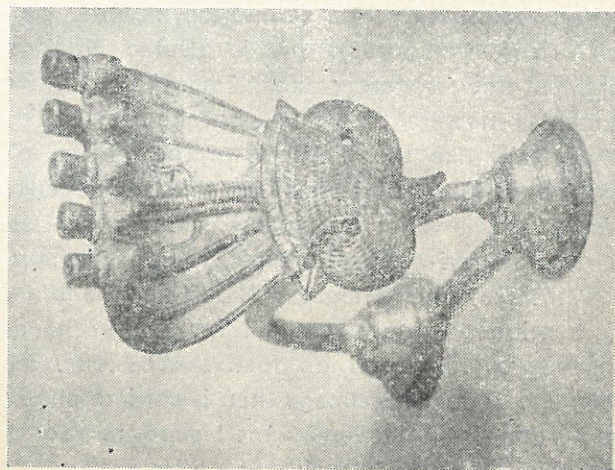
Gopura - arati



Halagarati, Dhuparati and Kurmarati



Panchayudha - arati



Sesharati

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 '*rajasa*' (or middling) variety consists of flowers like *brhaṭi* (*solanum*), *dhattūra* (white thorn-apple, *Datura alba*), *raktotpala* (red lotus), *palāśa* (*Butea Frondosa*), *pātala* (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*), *Pandanua odoratissimus* (*ketakī*), *Saccharum spontaneum* (*kāśa*, a variety of grass), china rose (*japā*), a variety of lotus (*sri-parṇi*, *Gmelina Arborea*), *Terminalia Bellerica* (*vibhītaka*) and *Pentapetes Phoeniceia* (*bandhūka*). The last mentioned variety, while forbidden in the daily rituals, may however be used on festive occasions, as for instance in decorating the image that is carried about in procession. Along with flowers, some leaves are also used in worship, like the *tulasī* (basil), the *bilva* (bel) and the *dūrvā* grass.

According to *Suprabhedāgama*, in decorating an image for worship, one part must be covered with flowers, one part with cotton or silk apparel, two parts with jewels and other ornaments, and one part must be left clear for worship (*pūjābhāga*). It is usual for colourful garlands to be hung round the neck of the deity, reaching the ankles. Unstrewn flowers are placed at the feet of the deity, the ritual being called 'pushpanyāsa'.

Aromatic incense is also burnt during worship. It is usually a preparation of the exudation of the tree known as *Amyris Agallochum* (*guggula*) mixed with clarified butter. The best quality of it, however, is said to contain one part of *agaru* (*Agallochum*), two parts of *niryāsa* (fragrant gum resin), and three parts of *chandana* (sandal paste), all well kneaded with camphor (*karpūra*) and honey (*madhu*). Offering incense precedes the waving of light, and hence the two offerings are often together called 'dhūpa-dīpa', before the food-offerings (*naivedya*) are made.

Different kinds of seats (*āsana*), for the image are prescribed to be employed in different sequences of the ritual. Usually five are employed: an octagonal seat called *yogāsana* for inviting the deity for worship (*āvāhana*), a square seat called *simhāsana* for giving bath (*snāna*), a circular seat called *mahāpadma* for actual worship (*archanā*), an hexagonal seat called *vimala* for offering food (*naivedya* or *bhojana*), and a triangular seat called *anantāsana* for relaxation or recreation (*vinoda*). Details of the pentad (*pañchāsana*) are given in texts like *Chandra-jñānāgama* and *Suprabhedāgama*. The former work also provides the information about the symbolic significance of the five seats: the five *āsanas* represent the five primary elements, fire

(*agni*), water (*āpah*), air (*vāyu*). *ākāśa*, and earth (*prthivī*), respectively.

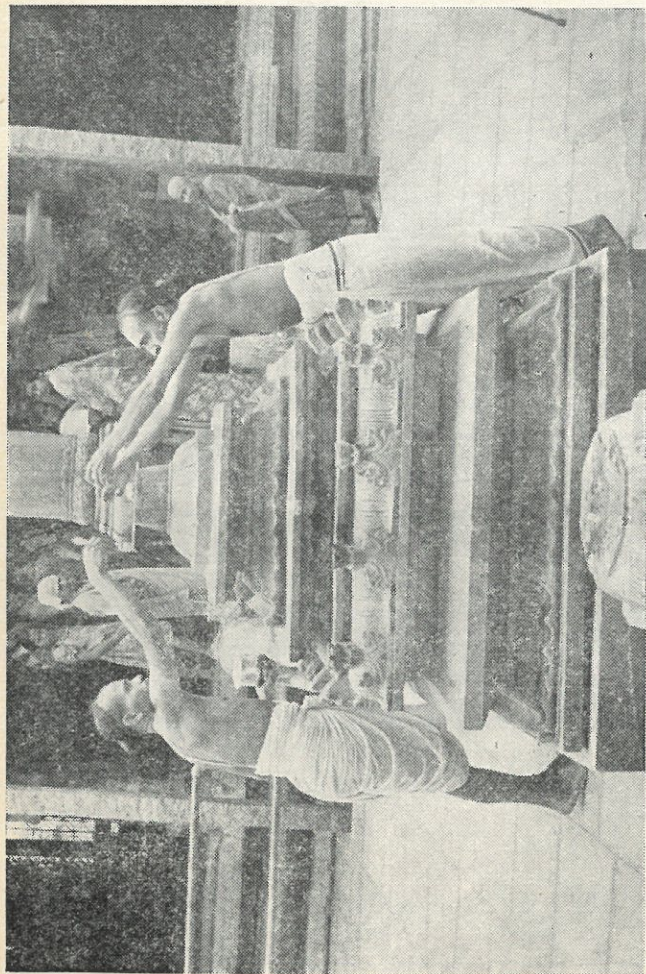
After food is offered to the deity (*naivedya*), it is customary to present *tāmbūla* consisting of some betel leaves (*nāga-vallī-dala*), areca-nut (*pūgi-phala*), mixed with some camphor-powder (*karpūra*) and spices for aroma and fragrance. Even when no prepared food (consisting of the four varieties of food, viz., *bhakshya*, *bhojya*, *choshya* and *pāniya*) is available for offering, the *tāmbūla* is offered along with a 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 *sthāṇḍila*) or a fire-pit (*homa-kunḍa*), or may have a mobile metallic fire-container (*chullā*). The temple may also have a supply of all the implements (like the *sruva* and *sruk*) that are required for the ritual, as well as the vessels to contain the articles for oblation (*āhuti-dravya*). However, priests tend to content themselves with carrying out the most essential details of the ritual, which has now become incidental and routine, if indeed it is performed at all. It must be borne in mind that this ritual bears no natural, nor necessary, relevance to the worship rituals that are conducted in a temple.

After food is ceremonially offered to the main image in the sanctum, portions of food are laid on the altar (*bali-pīṭha*) and on several spots around the sanctum, in order to propitiate the attendant-divinities (*parivāra-devatā*). Food is



Fire oblations being offered in a temple

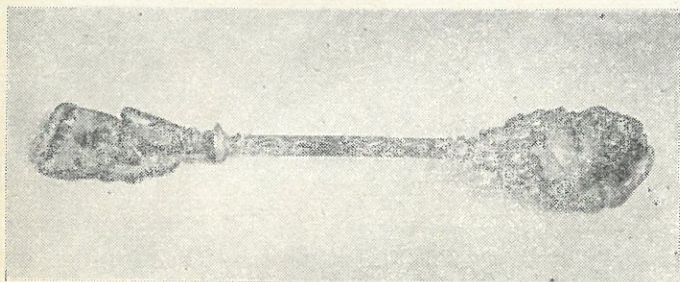


Placing food-offerings on the altar (bali-pitha) after food is offered to the main image in the sanctum



Offering bali to the 'door-keeper' (dvāra-pālā)

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



Ritual laddle

(*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.

III

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 *upāsana* (*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 '*śoḍaśopachāra 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 (*pādyā*), (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-bhūshane*), (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 (*pradakshīṇa*), 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 (*sannidhikāraṇa*), (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-vādyā*), reciting laudatory verses (*stuti* or *stotra*), presenting fire-oblations (*homa*), and providing bed (*śayana*).

These do not include the rituals that the priest has to perform preparatory to worship. The day for the priest commences with a bath after the morning ablutions. It must be noted that the bath itself is a ritual for the priest, for there are prescriptions about the water to be used (well-water or water from the running stream is preferred), the place where the bath is to be had (open), the hymns that must be recited during the bath (*snāna-mantra*), and the clothes that must be worn after the bath (*vastra*). The bath is followed by the ritual of internal purification by

means of sipping sanctified water (*āchamana*), regulating the breathing process for the specified duration (*prāṇāyāma*), and investing the various parts of his body with divine presence (*anga-nyāsa, kara-nyāsa*). Then he performs the customary ritual of *sandhyā-vandana*, which is indispensable for the twice-born, and proceeds with the *āhnikā* or the day's rituals which are incumbent on him to perform. Then he finishes his household worship (the worship of his tutelary deities in accordance with his family-custom and according to the initiation that he has received), before he goes to the temple for conducting worship there.

Opening of the temple-door for the day is also a ritual. Custom requires that the priest at dawn carries the keys of the temple on his head goes round the temple thrice, and prostrates before the main door of the temple. It is only then that he reverentially unlocks the door and enters the sacred precincts, along with the attendants. He again circumambulates the main shrine (or the sanctum) thrice, and looks at the tower over the sanctum (*vimāna*), before he opens the sanctum. He bows to the deity and offers a short prayer. In temples where the entrance of the sanctum is flanked by 'door-guardians' (*dvāra-pāṇa*), they receive the first homage, even before the door of the sanctum are opened.

The priest, or his attendant, trims the wicks of the oil lamps, and provides fresh oil for the lamps. The precincts of the temple as well as the vessels used for worship are cleaned, water for the rituals is collected, flowers and other articles required for worship are gathered. The sanctum has to be cleaned by the priest himself, for texts forbid a lay

person from entering the sanctum. He also attends to the lamps, which have been left burning all through the night in the immediate vicinity of the deity. Then he proceeds to formally 'wake up' the deity to receive the day's worship. This is technically known as 'prabodhana'. This completes the series of preparatory rituals and signifies preparing (or getting ready) the deity for the sequences of the ritual worship (18, 16, or 5).

Worship in the temple is usually conducted three times in the course of twenty-four hours : morning (*prātaḥ*), noon (*mādhyaḥnā*) and evening (*sāyam*). This is known as 'tri-kāla pūja'. This is regarded as the minimum number of times beneficial worship may be conducted ; for worship conducted twice only is inadequate, and once only altogether ineffective. But the number may be increased, and some texts provide worship as many as twelve times.

Most of the texts, however, prescribe six times of worship as most beneficial. Known as 'ṣaṭ-kāla pūja', this worship involves worship at early dawn (*pratyūsha*, about 5 a.m.), early morning (*kāla-sandhi*, about 6 a.m.), pre-noon (*upa-sandhi*, about 9 a.m.), noon (*madhyāhna*, 12 noon), evening (*sāyankāla*, 6 p.m.), and late night (*ardha-yāma*, 10 p.m.). Sometimes an early-night worship (known as *pradosha-puja*, at about 8 a.m.) also is conducted.

The Vaikhāṇasa texts provide for worship six times, whereas the Śaiva texts insist on the 'pradosha-pūjā' as the sixth, before the 'ardha-yāma pūjā', is conducted. The 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 *prātaḥ*) 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 is inviting the represented divinity to partake in the ritual (*āvāhana*). The second is invoking life-force (*sthāpana*) in the representation of the divinity so that the image worshipped is for the time being the divinity itself. This is necessary in household worship, but is not relevant in temples, where the images installed according to āgamic prescriptions are always 'alive' and fit for worship without formal 'infusion of life-force' (*prāṇa-pratishṭhā*). However, the ritual detail of *sthāpanā* involves seating (*āsana*) and other formalities of preparing the deity for the day's worship.

This is followed by (3) getting the deity in proper communion with the worshipper (*sannidhi-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 consti-

tute the full ritual. There are variant hymns used and different procedures adopted, according to Vaikhāṇasa, Pāṇchārātra, 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 Vaikhāṇasa tradition, as an illustration.

The priest sits to the right of the image and rings the bell, in order to invite the gods for worship and to scare away the evil spirits. He utters a hymn to this purport. Then he cleanses the earth (bhū-śuddhi), purifies the elements, and recites the resolve to worship, known as 'sankalpa'. He invokes blessings on all the residents of the village, as he is conducting the worship as a representative of all of them.

The priest then removes the old flowers from the icon, starting from the East and proceeding in a clockwise fashion to North-east, uttering a hymn which seeks to remove diseases and throw away the evil forces. He then obtains permission from the deity to proceed with the worship ritual, and cleans the place of worship with water and lays flowers at the feet of the deity (nirmālya-śodhana and pushpa-nyāsa).

This is followed by the transformation and accommodation of all the elements that constitute both the worshipper's own body and the world around (bhūta-samhāra-nyāsa). Then comes the ritual of bringing into being the elements that help the worship ritual (bhūta-sṛiṣṭi-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-pratiṣṭhā' 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 Vaikhāṇasa tradition, however, the temple ritual is meant to draw the ever-present 'life' in the main, immoveable stone image (*dhruva-bera*) and invest it in the small moveable, metallic image that is used in worship (*chala-bera*). The main image will not thereby be deprived of any of its own life, and the situation is likened to a lamp lighting other lamps, and burning as bright as ever. The 'life' present in the main image is assured to it at the moment of consecration and does not need to be renewed, whereas the moveable images need to be invested with 'life' every time the worship is conducted *viz.*, daily.

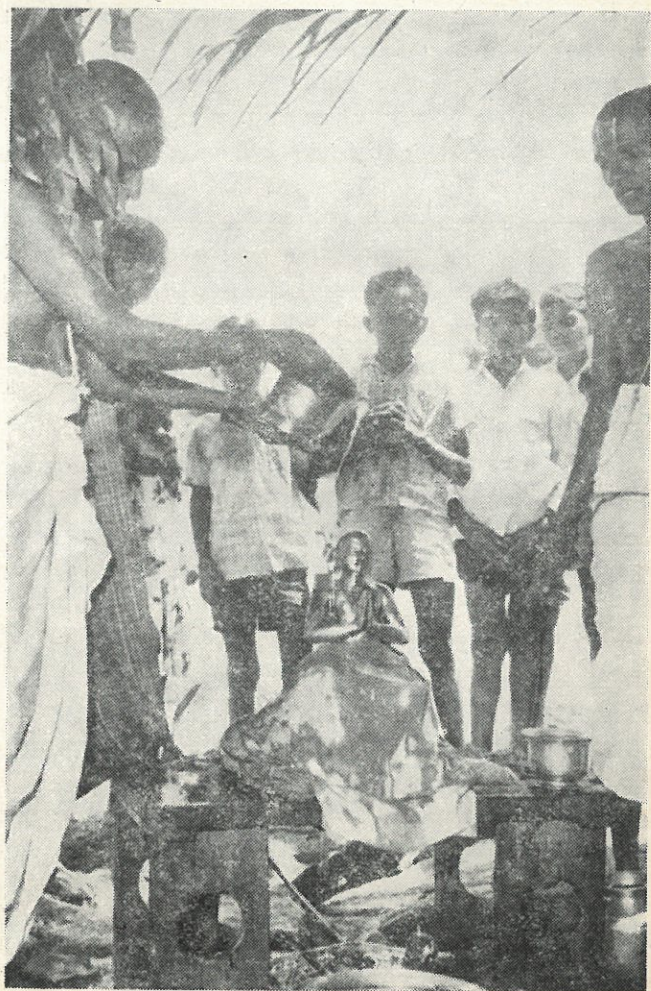
After this ceremony, the worshipper proceeds to prepare himself for the worship, by securing competence to worship (*bhagavad-ārāḍhanā-dhikāra-yogyatā-siddhi*) through the ritual of 'brahma-nyāsa' (involving the sequences of invoking divine presence in his heart, in his head, and in the tufts of his 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

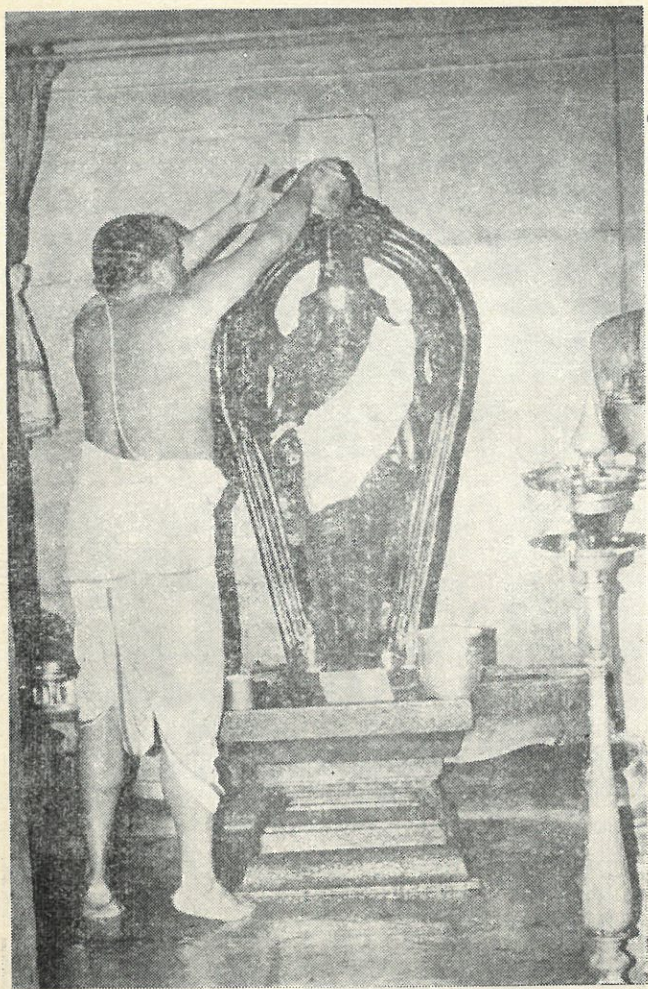
as the platform on which the worship is conducted are purified by sprinkling some of this water on them. The worshipper then conjures up the five forms of Vishṇu (Satya, Purusha, Achyuta, Aniruddha and Vishṇu), and offers flowers at the feet of the main image, which is now connected with the metallic 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-sūktā'. 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 (āchamaniya).

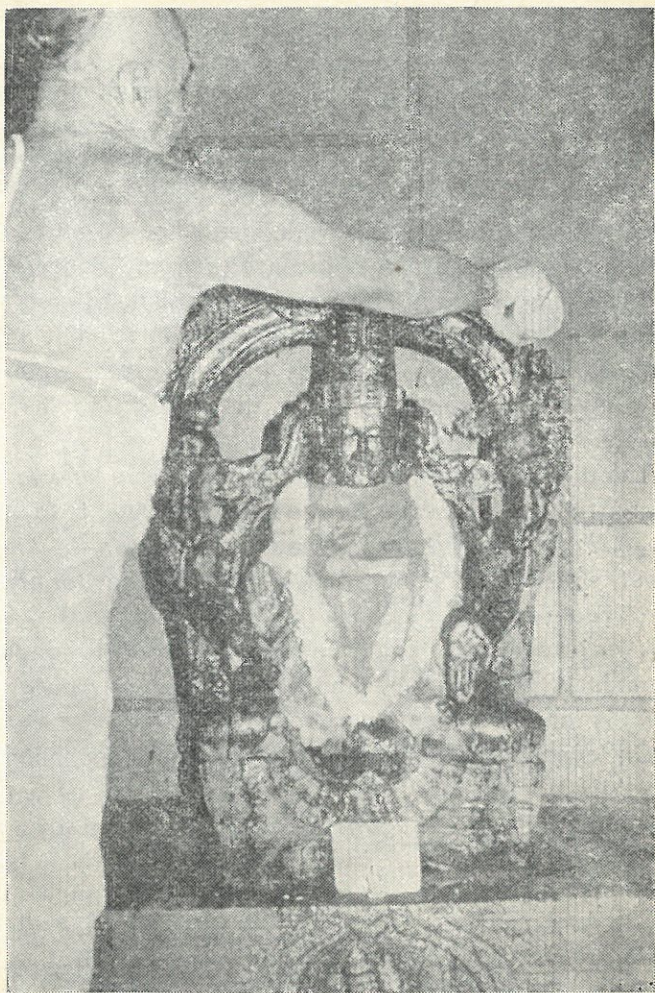
It is customary to use water sprinkled with sweet milk for the second round of bathing, after which the icon is rubbed with turmeric, and again washed with clean water (śuddhodaka). The bath being over, the icon is dried with a piece of cloth (plota) while a hymn is being recited, and then is returned to its former position on the platform. Sometimes, after the regular bath, a shower-bath with a silver plate containing a thousand holes (sahasra-dhār) is given, before being shifted to the platform. The ritual bath is known as snāna, or abhisheka or mārjana. It is usual to



Bath being given to the processional image on a platform (snanasana)



Bath to the main image in the sanctum with water from the tender cocoanut
(abhisheka)



Bath given with water poured from the conch (suddhodaka snana)

employ a conch for giving bath with clean water (śuddho-daka).

When the icon is returned to the platform, the formal worship (pūjā) begins by offering the deity garments (vastra and uttariya), ornaments (ābharāṇa), sacred thread (upavīta) and flowers (pushpa). The sequence constitutes the main worship, when flowers, sandal paste and consecrated rich (gandhākshata), incense (dhūpa), light (dīpa), food (naivedya) and tāmbūla are ceremonially offered. It is during this sequence that one hundred and eight names (aṣṭottaraśata) 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 'pañchāmṛta-snāna' is administered. After the first round of bath in water a bath in milk (dugdha) is given, followed by a bath in curds (dadhi), a bath in ghee (ghṛta), a bath in honey (madhu), a bath in sugar (śarkarā), and a bath in cocoanut-water (narikela-jala or phalodaka) are given in order, reciting an appropriate vedic hymn for each article. Finally, bath in clean water (śuddhodaka-snāna) is administered. Before the five articles are used, five forms of the divinity are invoked in them : Vāmana in curds, Vishṇu in ghee (clarified



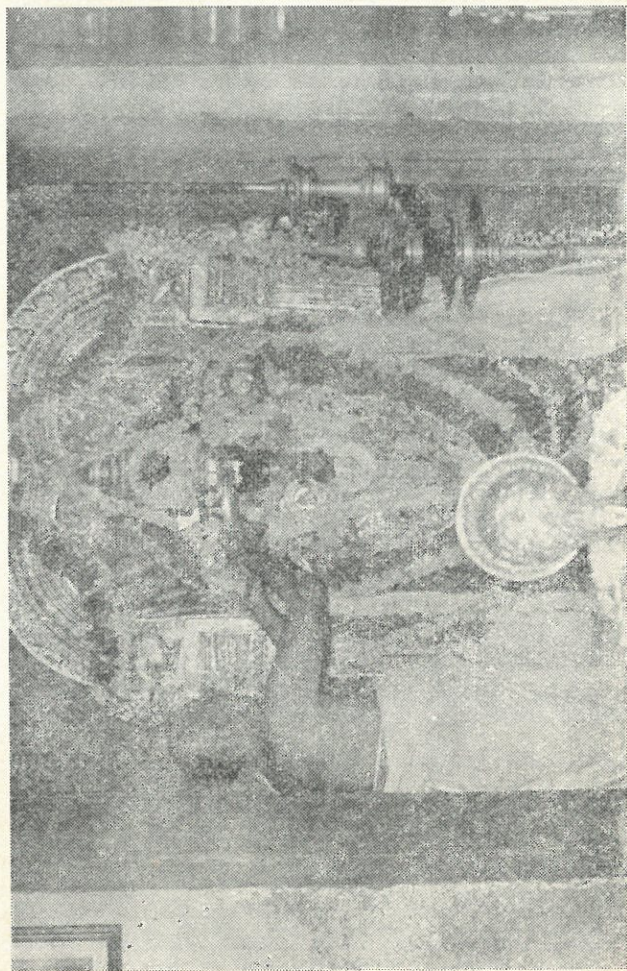
Bath given with milk (kshirabhisheka)

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'.

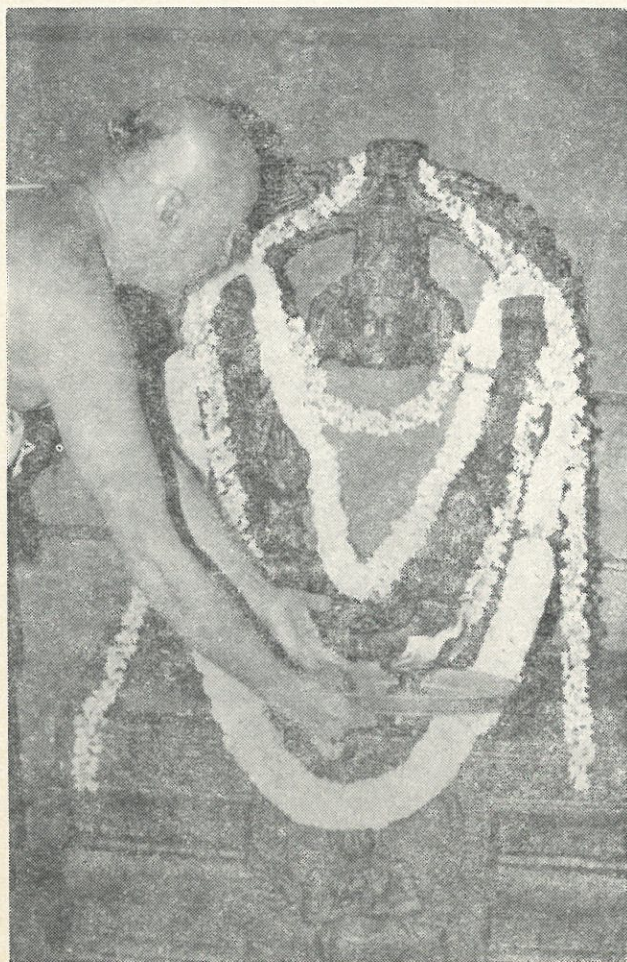
It may be noted that the vessels containing water for different ritual sequences are also placed in a prescribed manner : the vessel containing water for arghya is placed to the North-West, the vessel with water for pādya to the South-West, the vessel for āchamaniya to the North-East, and the vessel containing water to be used for giving the bath (snāna) to the South-East. In the centre is placed the vessel containing what is known as 'madhu-parka' (literally, 'a mixture of honey', but containing curds, milk, ghee, honey and sugar). The last is the offering usually made to an honoured guest, and in worship it is offered immediately before the bath is given.

Towards the end of the sequence of worship comes the final waving of light (nīrājana), very elaborately done, following by hymnal offerings (mantra-pushpa), recital of laudatory verses (stotra), seeking pardon for the lapses (kshamāpaṇa), circumambulations (pradakṣiṇa) and prostrations (namaskāra).

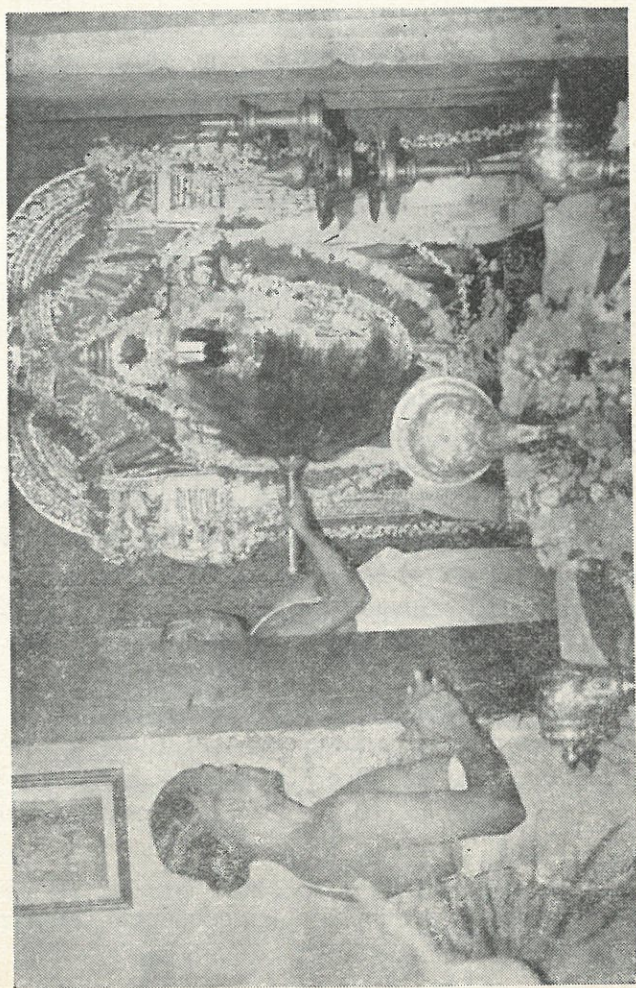
On special occasions, the deity after normal worship is seated on a throne and is treated like a king : an umbrella (chhatra) is held over the head, fly-whisks (chāmara) are waved, a mirror (ādarśa) is presented, and the deity is entertained by music (gita, vādyā), dance (nṛtta) and recitals from the vedic literature, poetical works, purāṇic narratives, kalpa-sūtras and smṛti-texts.



Waving of light in front of the deity (nirajana)



Waving of light in front of the deity (diparadhana)



Fanning the deity with a fly-whisk (chamara seva)

IV

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 *Uttara-kāraṇāgama* (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 ('utkr̥ṣṭa-vachanam'), and by 'sava' sacrifice ('yajna'), *Nāradya-samhitā* (18) and *Īśvara-samhitā* (10, 3) give yet another interpretation : 'ut' means "obstacles", "impediments", ('vighnah') 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 calendar events with astronomical significance (*e.g.* Yugādi, Sankrānti, Onam, Chittirai, Āḍi, Diwali, Vasanthā-panchami, Śrāvani, Vaiśākhi etc.), or in honour of a divinity (*e.g.* Rāma-navami, Krishṇa-janmāṣṭami, Mahā-śiva-rātri, Durgā-pūjā, Vara-lakshmi-vratam, Narasimha-jayanti, Nāga-panchami, Ganeśa-chaturthi, Skanda-shashṭi etc.) or for participation in a community activity (*e.g.* Rakshā-bandhana, Dasarā, Vana-yātrā, 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-janmāṣṭami in a Krishṇa temple, Mahā-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



Taking the deity to a river : a community affair

well as the nation' ('prajānām api rāshṭrasya sarvābhyudaya-sādhakam', *Purushottama-samhitā*, 23, 6), to 'undo the evil effects of calamities, famine and terrible portents' ('durbhiksha-durnimittādi-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 śubham', *ibid.* 7).

Festivals in temples are described in texts as greatly meritorious, as they achieve renewed sanctity for the deities worshipped ('devānām api sarveshām pavitrikaraṇāya 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 lightning, fire accidents in the temple premises, famine, floods, excessive rain, disturbance in the position of the main image in the sanctum, sight of a second sun, damage caused to the icons in the temple, death occurring within the enclosure of the temple, or defilement caused to the temple in any other way (*Īśvara-samhitā*, 10, 1-7, *Pārameśvara-samhitā* 19, 5-7; *Purushottama-samhitā*, 23, 6, *Śrī-praśna*, 31, 9 etc.); and festivals conducted when a grave calamity befalls the people of the locality, an epidemic, threat of war or illness of the king (*Aniruddha-samhitā*, 20, 2-9; *Pādma-sāṅcharyā*, 20, 9-18); and (3) *kāmya* (to accomplish the cherished goals of the people), festivals conducted to commemorate the building of the temple or the installation of the main icon, or when desired by the people (*Nāradya-samhitā*, 18, 6; *Īśvara-samhitā*, 10, 8, *Aniruddha-samhitā*, 20, 10; *Pārameśvara-samhitā*, 16, 7-8).

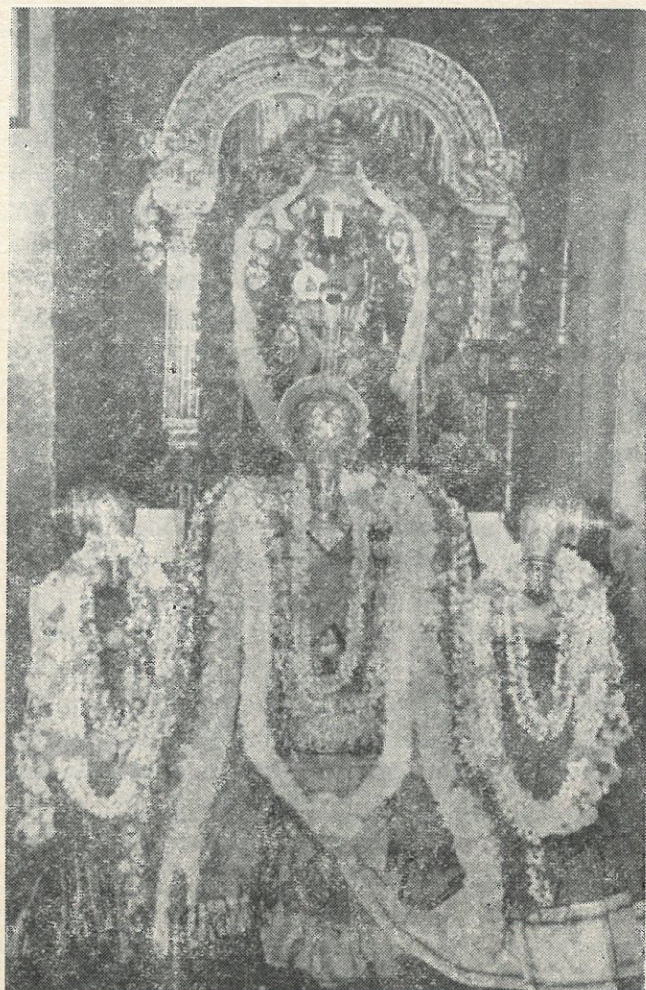
Of the three kinds of festivals mentioned above, the first is described as *sāttvika*, or activities done in the spirit of an ordained duty, with no desires attached to them, while the second is described as *rājasa*, or activities done to avert a disaster, repair some damage, or cleanse and purify. The third kind of festivals belongs to the *miśra* or mixed type. Some texts, however, describe the *nitya* festivals as 'sāttvika', *kāmya* as 'rājasa' and *naimittika* as 'tāmāsa' (e.g. *Śrī-praśna*, 31, 16).

Festivals can be conducted only after the daily and customary rituals of worship (*nityārchana*) 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 *snapanā-bera* to receive the daily bath, *bali-bera* to dole out the food-offerings to the subordinate divinities in the temple, *utsava-bera* to be carried about in processions on festive occasions, *koluvu-bera* to preside over the daily court held in the hall of the temple, etc.). The system of having five icons (including the main image in the sanctum) is known as '*pañcha-bera*'. While the main image is in stone or wood, the other images are metallic. However, the principal icons are only two : the immoveable image in the sanctum (*mūla-bera*) and the metallic image that is used for festivals (*utsava-bera*).





The main image (dhruva-bera) along with the processional image (utsava-bera) in the sanctum

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-jñāna*, 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 Vaiṣṇava 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 Vaiṣṇava divisions); and if it is for nine days, it is 'Śākta' (or 'Vaishnava'), (*Raurava-kriyā*, 18, 8-9 and *Īśvara-saṃhitā*, 13).

There are also festivals that stretch for twelve days, and they are called 'Saura' (acc. to *Dīptāgama* 83) or 'paitṛka' (acc. to *Pūrvakāraṇāgama*, 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 Vaiṣṇavite texts generally prohibit festivals that go beyond twelve days (e.g., *Hayasīrsha-saṃhitā*, 36,4), although there are texts which extend the limit to 21 days (e.g., *Nāradya-saṃhitā*, 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*'). *Nārāyaṇa-samhitā* (44) mentions that one-day festivals please Brahma, three-day festivals Śiva, seven-day festivals Lakshmi, and nine-day festivals Viṣṇu.

There is another classification of festivals suggested in *Kāraṇāgama*, 24, 424-5 which emphasizes the rituals involved rather than the days. Festivals, according to this text, are of four kinds : (1) '*sākalya*' ('complete', involving all the rituals, with no exception) ; (2) '*pāvana*' ('purifying', involving all the rituals except hoisting the ceremonial flag, *patākā*) ; (3) '*śānta*' ('bringing about peace', involving fire-rituals or *homa* in the morning, food-offerings or *bali*, at noon, and festivities, *utsava*, in the evening) ; (4) '*māngalya*' ('auspicious', involving whatever rituals are preferred by the donor, *yaḥjamāna*).

Festivals are further classified according to how they begin (*utsavārambha*). Texts like *Pārameśvara-samhitā* (16, 28-29) and *Nārādīya-samhitā* (18, 7-8) make a three-fold classification, in terms of the ritual marking the commencement of the festival, which is regarded as the 'chief ceremony' (*mukhya-kalpa*) : (1) 'sprout-offering' (*ankurārpaṇa*), which causes all happiness and prosperity ('*sarva-sampat-samṛddhidam*') ; (2) 'beating the drum'

(*bherī-tāḍana*), which delights the gods ('*devānām priyāvaham*'); and (3) 'hoisting the flag' (*dhvajārohaṇa*), which causes happiness for all creatures ('*sarva-prāṇi-sukhāvaham*'). The benefits mentioned above are according to *Pūrva-kāraṇāgama* (141, 3-4). According to *Pārameśvara-saṃhitā* (16, 30), however, the benefits of the three kinds of festivals are : causing liberation for all beings ('*sarveshām mokshadam*'), resulting in enjoyment of heaven ('*svarga-bhoga-phala*'), and causing welfare of the kingdom and the king ('*rāja-rāshṭra-sukha*'), respectively.

It is usual for one-day festivals to commence with the 'beating of the drum' (*bherī-tāḍana*), which signifies invitation for the celestial beings to assemble and participate with the human beings in the festival. *Ajitāgama* (27, 23) precludes 'hoisting of the ritual banner or flag' (*dhvajārohaṇa*) from one-day, three-day and five-day festivals. For all other festivals, it is a necessary preparation. *Raurava-kriyāgama* (18) prescribes that festivals which are meant for pacification (*śāntika*) and nourishment (*paushtika*) should not have the flag-hoisting ceremony, while in festivals for victory (*jayada*) the flag-hoisting is optional, and in festivals for wealth (*dhanada*) and fulfilment of desires (*kāmada*) it is indispensable.

The day for the hoisting of the flag is to be determined in relation to the day on which the concluding ceremony known as *tīrtha-yātrā* or *avabhṛta-snāna* (the ceremonial bath of the icons as well as the devotees in a tank or river, marking the conclusion of the festival), as the latter is regarded as the most significant event in the festival. The day for this event is ascertained by consulting stellar positions and constellations. In fact, there is a classification

of festivals in terms of this event. If the ceremonial bath takes place on the ninth day, it is a 'superior' (*sāttvika*) festival; if on the seventh day, it is of midling merit (*rājasa*) and if on the fifth day it is 'inferior' (*tāmasa*) (*Śrī-praśna*, 31, 15). Thus the texts insist that the auspicious day for the 'tīrtha' is first to be determined (*Purushottama-samhitā*, 23 'niśchitya tīrtha-divasam yāga-karma samārabhet'; *Pūrva-kāraṇagama*, 141, 'tīrtham ādau viniśchitya').

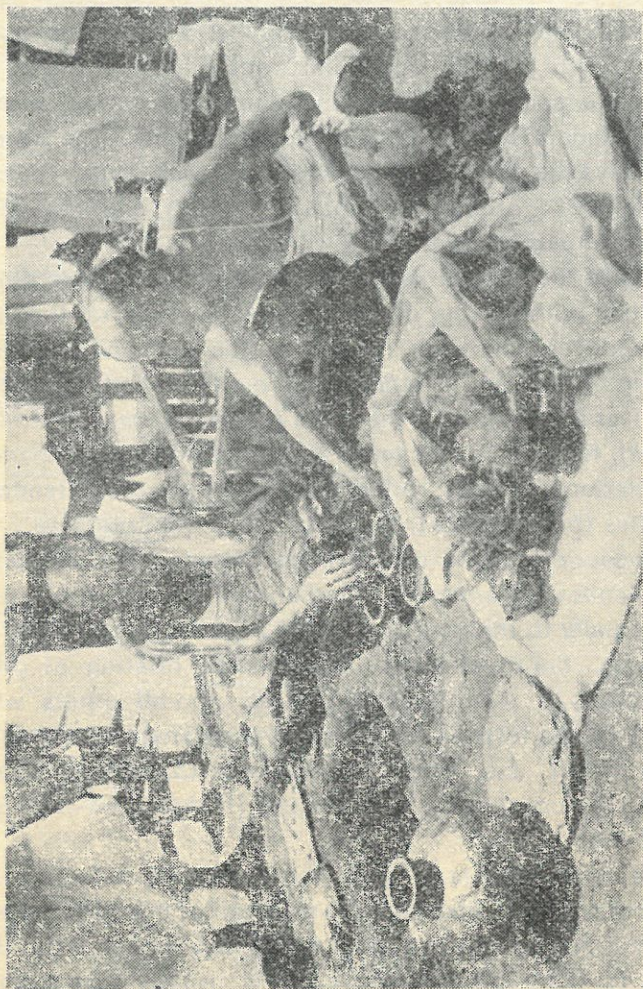
The flag-hoisting for the festivals (excluding the one-day, three-day and five-day festivals) is performed twenty-one days earlier to the day fixed for the 'ceremonial bath' (*tīrtha-yātrā*), according to *Nāradya-samhitā* (18, 17). The flag or banner on which the figure of Indra, (the chieftain of the gods), of Garuḍa (the carrier of Viṣṇu), or of Viśvabha (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-yātrā*). 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

earthen pots filled with mud ceremonially collected and placed on a specially sanctified *maṇḍala*, offerings are made to the spirits in the eight directions, invoking them to protect the sprouts. This ceremony is done during night, because moon is regarded as the lord of plants. The subsequent days are meant for fire-sacrifice (*yāga*), a ritual called 'chūrṇotsava', offering of oblations (*bali*) and the final ceremonial bath (*tīrtha*).

In case the festival is elaborate, it covers fifteen days, beginning with 'sprout offering' (*ankurārpaṇa*) on the first day, and the following rituals on the remaining days : hoisting of the flag (*dhvajārohaṇa*), purifying bath (*śuddha-snāna*) or the beating of the drum (*bheri-tāḍana* or *bherikā-ghoṣa*), 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 gaity 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 (*dakṣhīṇa-sampradāna*), and finally taking down the flag ceremonially (*dhvajāvarohaṇa*), marking the conclusion of the festival (*Vishvakṣena-samhitā*, 27, 12-16).

The most important festival in a temple is known as 'brahmotsava' so called because the chief of the gods *Brahmā* himself is supposed to conduct this festival in honour of the presiding deity of the temple. It is usually very grand, spectacular, colourful, and full of gaity ; it draws huge and enthusiastic crowds of devotees, and the village assumes a

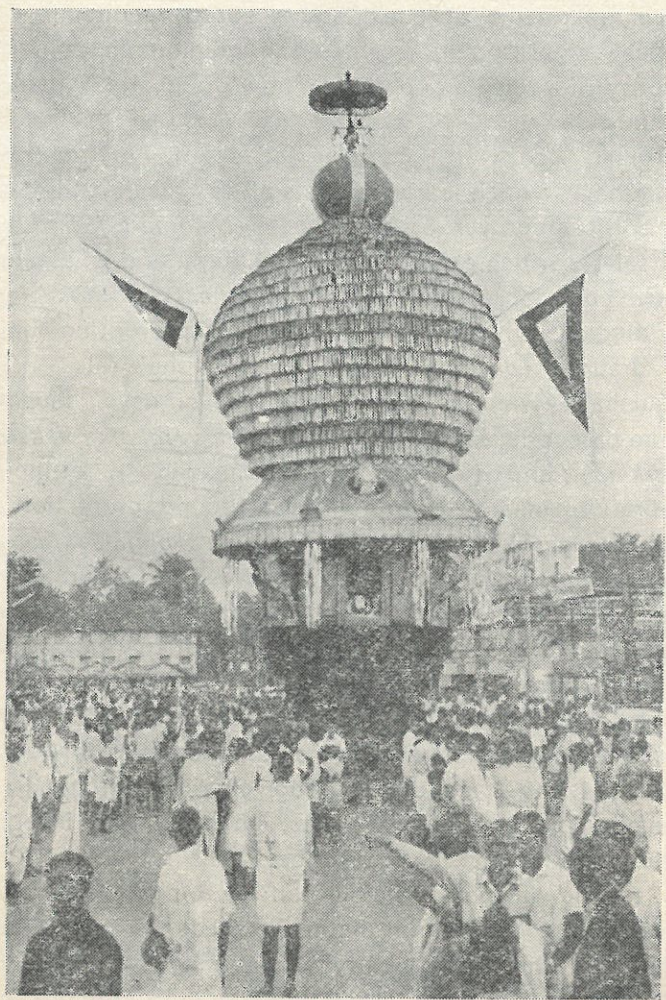


Ankurarpana ritual

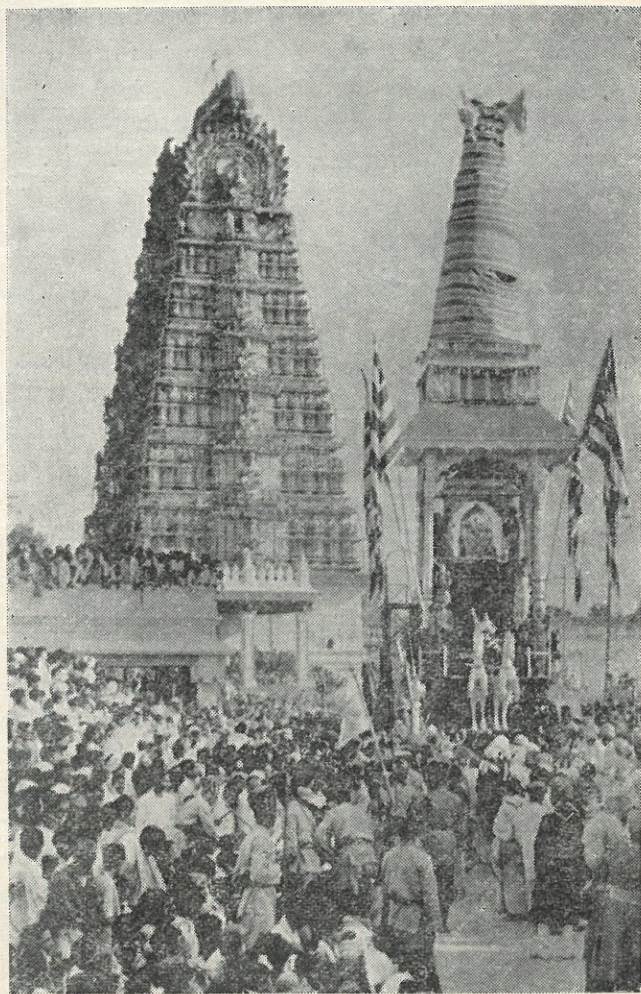
festive look. It is of considerable social, economic, and political significance, besides the religious import. The celebrity of a temple depends on how grand and popular its 'brahmotsava' is.

Texts speak of five varieties of *brahmotsava* : 1) 'brāhma', which is only a day's affair, meant to increase the spiritual power of the temple (*brahma-tejo-vṛddhi*) ; (2) 'śaiva', which goes on for three days and is meant to remove all obstacles to the people (*vighna-nāśana*) ; (3) 'aindra', a five-day affair meant for preventing famine and draught (*durbhiksha-nāśa*) ; (4) 'ārsha' (also called 'mānusha'), which is conducted for seven days, meant to secure prosperity for the kingdom (*rājya-vardhaka*, *lakshmī-prīti-kara*) ; and (5) 'daivika' (or 'vaishnava'), a nine-day celebration meant to bring about around protection and happiness of the people (*sarva-rakshārha*, *prajā-sukhāvaha*). The *brahmotsava* of nine-days is regarded as 'superior', viz., most beneficial (*sāttvika*), and the festivals of seven and five-days are respectively 'of midling merit' (*rājāsa*) and 'inferior' (*tāmasa*).

The most impressive event of the *brahmotsava* is of course the procession of the presiding icon in an elaborately decorated and tastefully got-up chariot (*ratha*), to the accompaniment of music, dance, chanting and incessant cheers from the crowds of devotees. The procession leaves the temple in an auspicious and previously determined moment and goes round the main roads of the village or town. As the chariot carrying the deity winds its way, pulled by eager crowds, householders stop the chariot in front of their houses and offer flowers, fruits and gifts to



Rathotsava

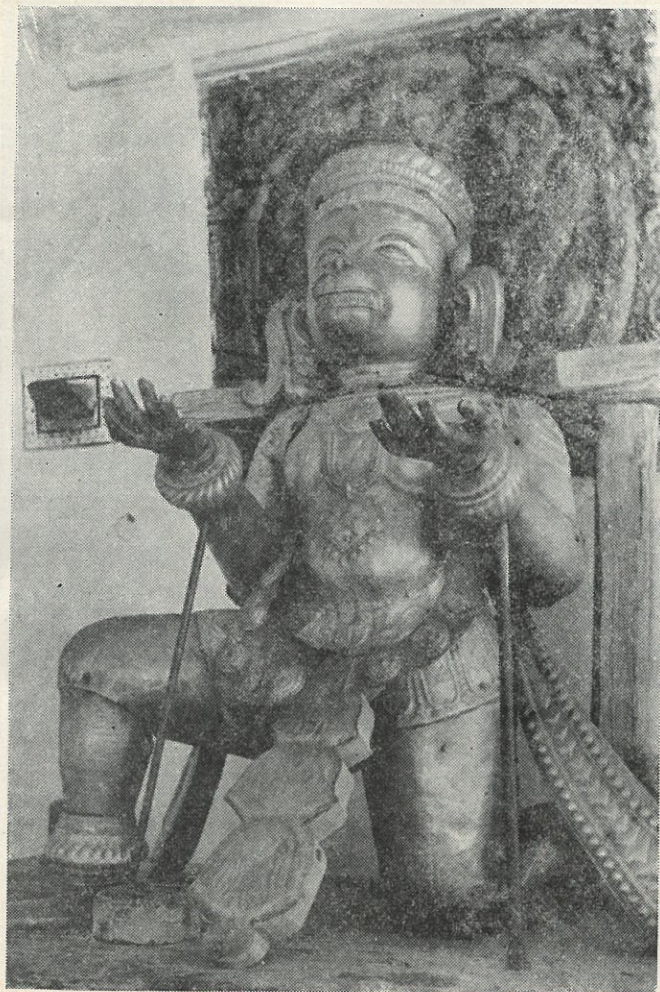


Rathotsava

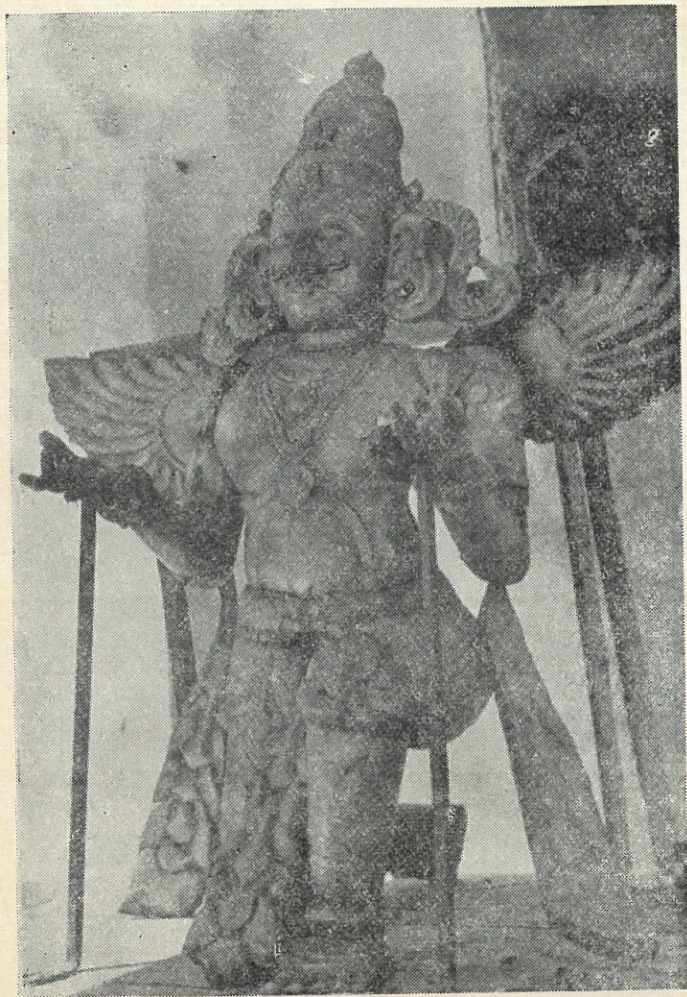
the deity. The car-festival, as it is generally described, marks the climax of the *brahmotsava* series of rituals.

Besides procession in the chariot, the presiding deity of the temple is also carried about in procession on different impressive models of birds and animals, vehicles (*vāhana*), on different days of the festival. Among the popular 'vehicles' are : palanquin (*śibika*), lunar orb (*chandra-maṇḍala*), solar orb (*sūrya-maṇḍala*), lion (*śimha*), horse (*aśva*), elephant (*gaja*), swan (*hamsa*), snake (*ananta* or *śeṣha*), parrot (*śuka*), flower-pavilion (*pushpa-pīṭha*), and the mountain Meru and the wish-fulfilling tree (*kalpa-vṛkṣha*). In Śaiva temples, bull (*vṛṣabha*), and in Vaiṣṇava temples, *Garuḍa* and *Hanumān* are also used as 'vehicles', in temples dedicated to Skanda (*Subrahmanya*), 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' (*āṇḍalikā*) and entertained. *Parama-purusha-saṃhita*, 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-saṃhitā*, 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*). *Vāsisṭha-*



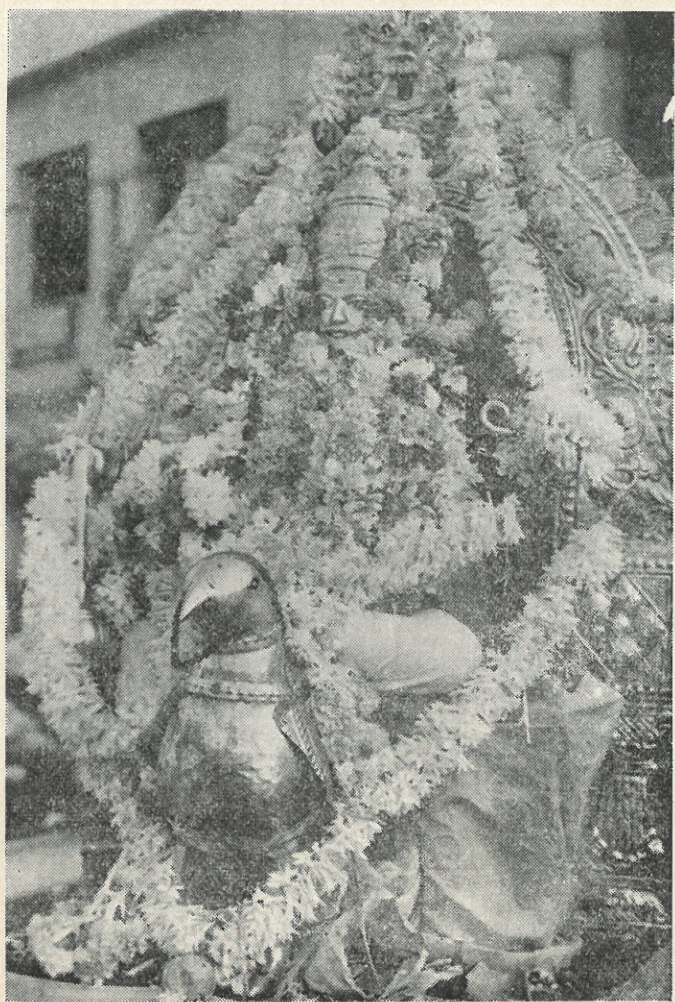
Hanumanta-vahana



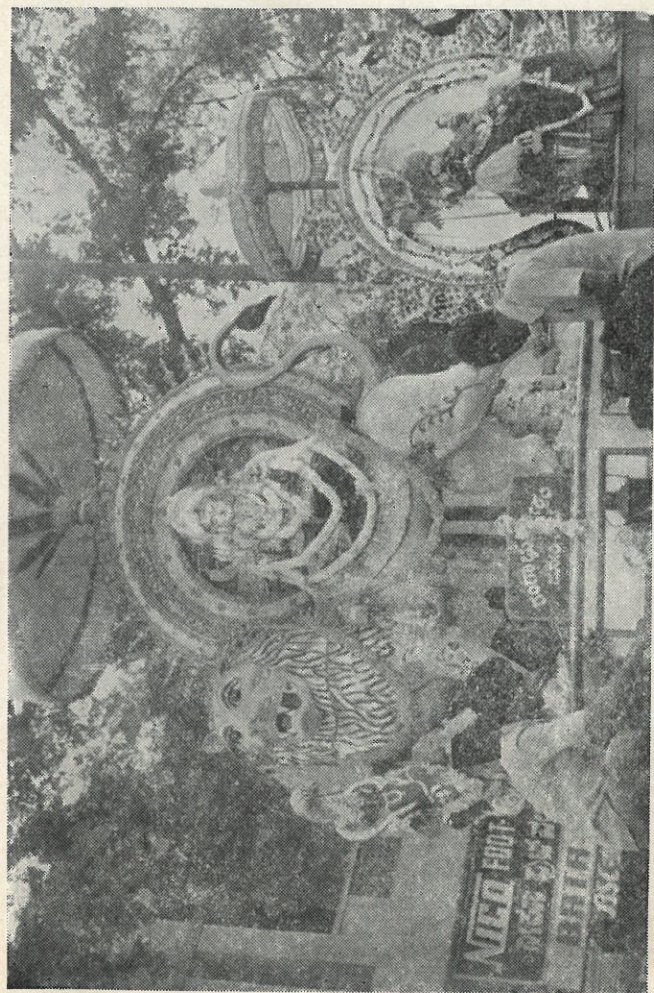
Garuda-vahana



Ravana-vahana

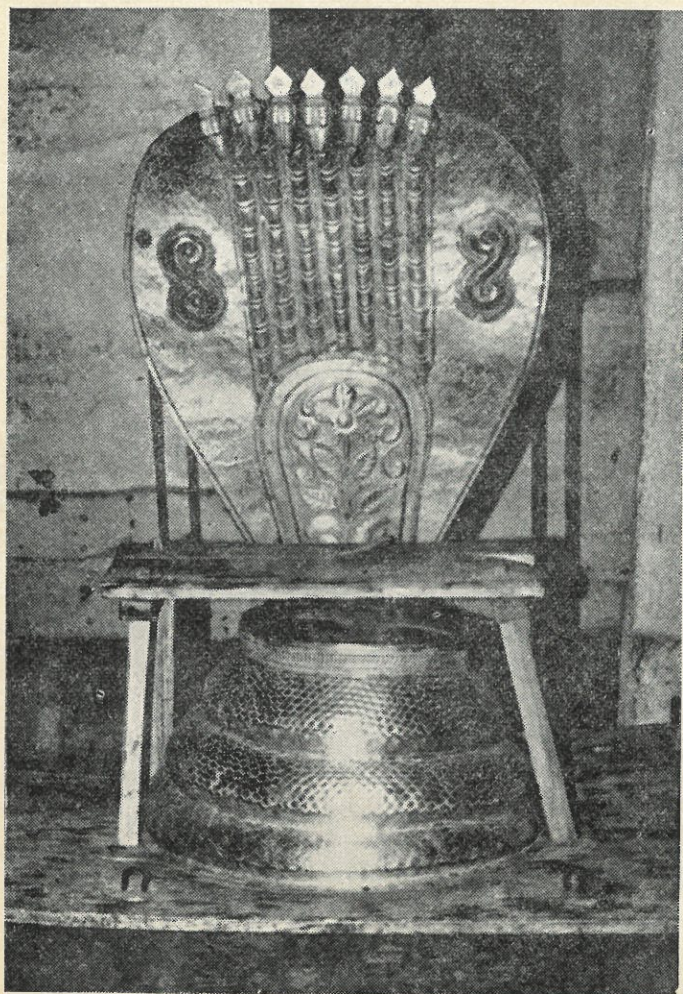


Suka-vahana

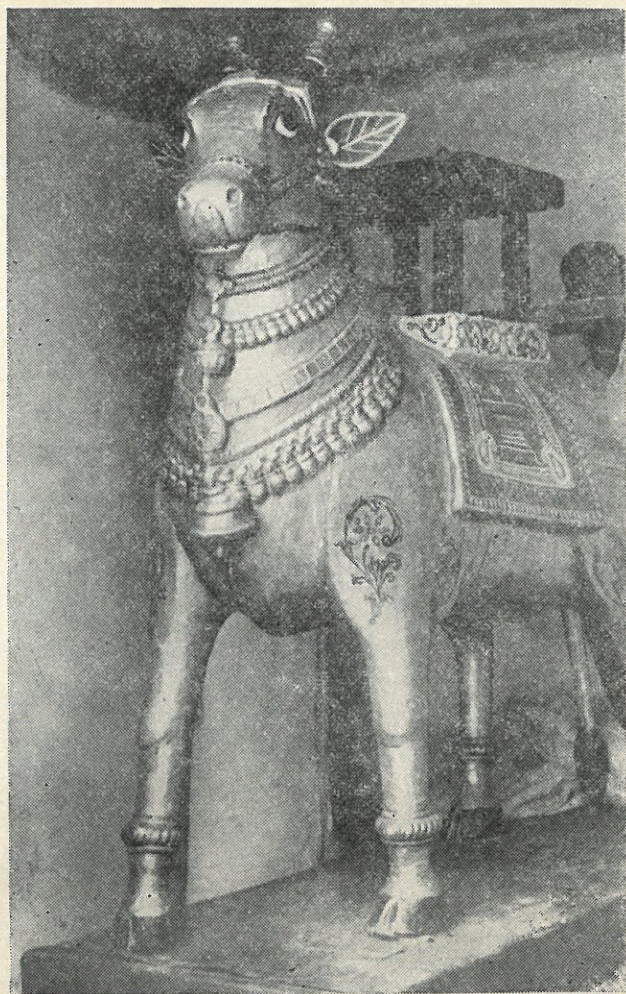


Simha-vahana

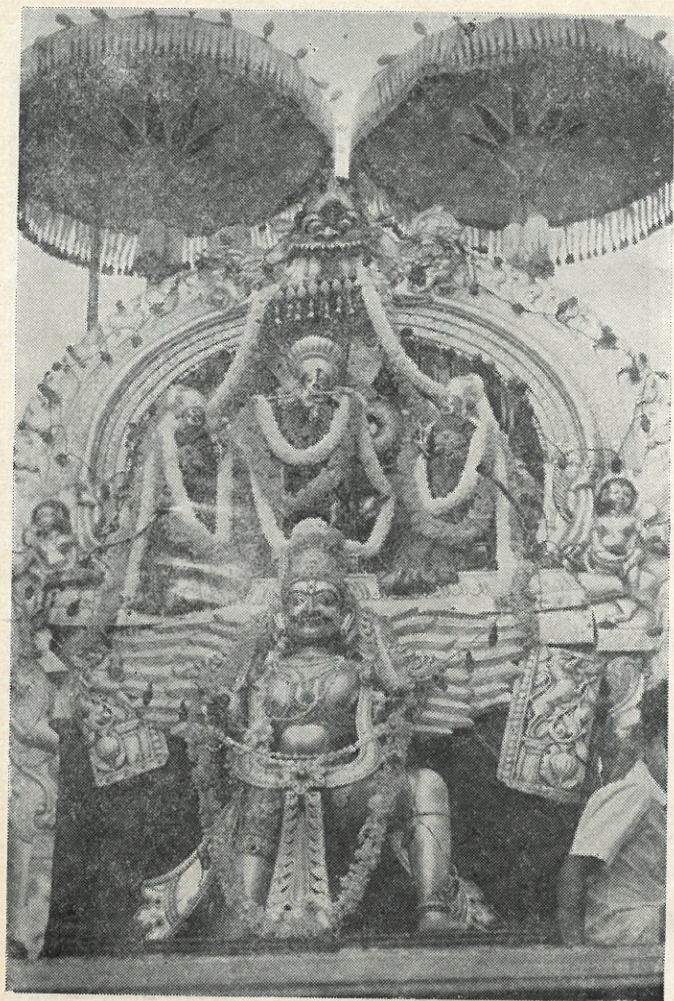
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Sesha-vahana

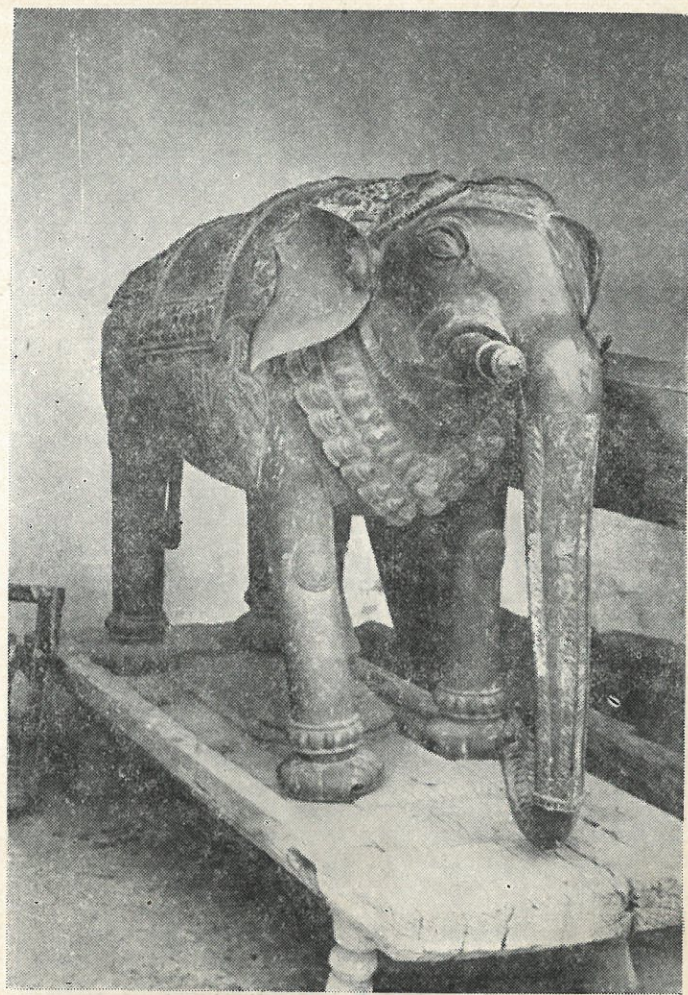


Vrshabha-vahana



Garuda-vahana

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Gaja-vahana



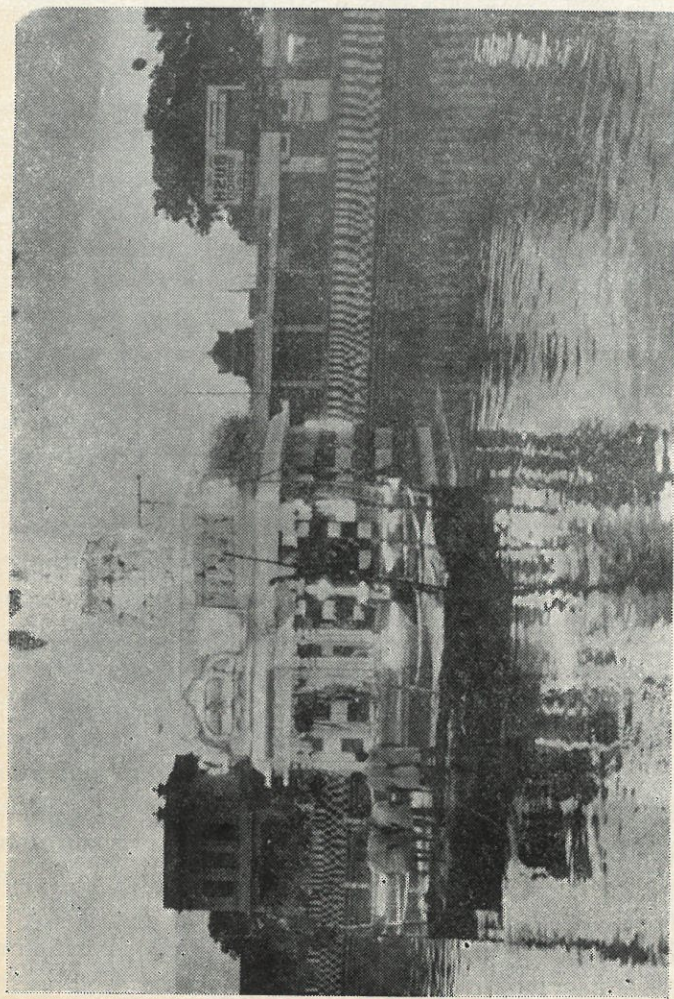
Vyaghra-vahana

samhitā, which suggests only a six-day festival, prescribes lion, Garuda, 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*, *seganḍi*, *kaī-manī*, *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, gaiety and tempo to the festival are also included, such as 'hunting in a forest' (*vana-yātrā*), when the presiding deity, dressed up as a hunter, is carried outside the village into the jungle along with young men wielding weapons like spear, cudgel, bows and arrows), or 'sport in water' (*jala-kelī* or *vasantotsava*), or yachting or floating.

Festivals that are annual in character and are conducted on fixed days in the calander (like the *vishu*, *viśākhā*, two *ayana-sankrāntis*, *pushyā*, *kṛittikā*, the birth constellation of the presiding deity, or the date determined by long custom for the *brahmotsava*) are called *nityotsava*. These must necessarily be performed, and therefore constitute important events of a temple. Festivals like *kalyāṇotsava* (or celebrating the wedding of 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



Yacht being prepared for teppotsava (or jala-keli)

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.

V

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, Tāntrik 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 Tāntrik ideology, however, projected divinity in terms of human or semi-human form (*mūrti*) and in terms of diagrams of merit (*mandala*), and of formulae of great import (*mantra*). Temples and iconic worship were a special feature of Tāntrik approach. But in actual practice, the two approaches coalesced, so that in the temple, icons and fire together received worship; *archā* and *homa* were alike rituals that were necessarily involved,

Symbolism is an ingredient of both *archā* and *homa* alike. The individual constitution (*piṇḍa*) and the cosmic organization (*brahmāṇḍa*) are essentially 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 *bahir-yāga* ('external ritual') or the *upachāras* ('the services'). In the former, God is recognized as the worshipper's own innermost spirit, while in the latter the personified God (represented by the icon) is treated like an honoured guest. All the sixteen 'upachāras' (like invitation, seating, offering water for the feet, offering water to sip and rinse the mouth, providing a bath, presentation of dry and fresh garments, serving food, etc.) are what were usually given in India for a guest. A guest, in the ancient reckoning, was indeed God in human form (hence the injunction, 'atithi-devo bhava').

Further, on the assumption that the human king derives his power and glory from God, God is treated like the king of kings. Many of the royal honours are, therefore, offered to the icon representing God, especially during festivals (e.g., umbrella, fly-whisk, music and dance, 'vehicles', flower-pavilion, swing, chariot etc). These are in fact known as '*rājopachāras*' or 'royal services or honours'. And on 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.

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 ('*bahir āgatya*') and reside with ease ('*sukham tishṭhatu*') in the icon in front ('*asmin bimbe*') until the worship ritual is completed (*yāvat pūjāvasānagam*').

It is only when the deity is thus duly externalized, and made to be invoked (*āvāhita*), established (*sthāpita*), present close at hand (*sannihita*), positioned right in front of the worshipper (*sammukha*), confined to the icon (*sanniruddha*), and well concealed (*avagunṭhita*), that the 'external' worship consisting of the services and honours (*upachāra*) becomes relevant and meaningful. Having come out of the worshipper, the deity is now fit to be worshipped as an object outside him ; it is treated as an honoured guest, as the most excellent royal personage who has arrived just then. But unless the worshipper retains the fundamental identity with the worshipped, despite the objectification of the latter, worship is again irrelevant. Hence the textual prescription : 'God is not to be worshipped by one who has not priorly become God himself' ('*nādevo bhūtvā devam pūjayet*').

When the formal worship is completed, the deity is 'dismissed' or sent away (*visarjana*). The ritual signifying this involves a 'taking back' of the divine presence (temporarily lodged in the icon) into the worshipper's own heart (which is its permanent residence). The worshipper recites the

mantra which means 'Come, O God who is residing in the icon, come into my heart-lotus' ('Ehy ehi, pratimā-sthita purushottama, mama hṛtkamale'); 'Reside in my heart, O lord of the world, along with your glory' ('hṛdaye kuru samvāsam śrīyā saha jagatpate').

The 'placement' (*nyāsa*) of divine presence in the human constitution is a necessary ritual sequence before the 'services' (*upachāra*) can be offered. It takes three forms : (1) *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 Sāṃkhya system of thought, which is accepted by all schools of Indian philosophy) to the abstract deity, so that it is individualized. The first form is purely Tāntrik in character, and accomplishes the analysis in the abstract of the entire expressive aspect of the universe (symbolized by speech).

The second form is also Tāntrik, although the Vedic influence in it is obvious, and it has a sectarian character. The aspects of the God dealt with here are so many powers (*śakti*), enumerated and named according to the seat to which one belongs. The Vaishṇavas adopt what is known as the 'Kesavādi-nyāsa', while the Śaivas follow 'Śrīkanthādi-nyāsa' and the Śāktas 'Kalā-nyāsa'. The third form is largely Vedic, although Tāntrik elements are discernible in it. The first two forms of *nyāsa* 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-pratisthā*). The image in such cases is a permanent repository of divine power, and the priest worships it without having to go through the 'prāṇa-pratishṭhā' 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.