

A Study of Excursus on Śaivagamic Rituals in Śiva Temples as Practised at Present in South India and Sri Lanka

M. Balakailasanathasarma

Swami Vipulanda institute of Aesthetic Studies, Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

ksnavan@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This research paper which forms a continuation of The Study of excursus on Saivagamic Rituals in Siva temples of Agamic Saivism as practiced at present in South India and Sri Lanka, seeks to investigate another important aspect the rites and religious practice associated with temple worships. This investigation will reveal the fact that this new form of Siva worship did not by any means emerge suddenly, but that it was the outcome of a long and gradual development it is significant that such features of Purānic religion practices as agamic rituals aspects which were unknown to the vedic system of worship played an intrinsic rule in the later system of agamic worship. It is based directly on the Saivagamas which have carried out such elaboration to the utmost degree. For their rituals the priests in Saiva temples employ mantras taken from agamas which are assigned a high status among the religious text. The Saiva rituals are similarly performed from temple in South India and Sri Lanka. In this regard a special reference may be made to Purvakaranagama which contains agamic injunctions prescribing the employment of various vedic mantras. Similarly, many of the elements of vedic sacrifice can be shown to have become essential constituents of late Saiva ritualism. The Epic and Puranas must be regarded as essentially containing the statement of the Dravidian religion recorded in the Sanskrit language through the Saivagamic texts. The details of the rituals as outlined above vary from temple to temple. Most of the temples lacking in adequate funds cannot afford any elaborate performance of rituals as far as the regular performance of the rituals even in their bare outline is concerned; only the big rich temples can properly afford it.

Keywords - Śaivagamic Rituals, Śaivaism, Sri Lanka

1. INTRODUCTION

The religious practices prevalent around the entire country do not differ widely from those that are in vogue in south India. The general resemblance which the temples bear to those in south India is due to the fact that this

religion was known throughout the whole of India. Since then, as time passed, Śaivites have always looked to south India for guidance in all religious matters. Indeed, such guidance can be shown to have been indispensable in several ways. It is from the South that experts are invited to assume the responsibilities of raising new temples and of renovating order oncs. Again, it is from south India that learned priests, proficient in the theory and practice of rituals, are invited to officiate at special rites such as pratiṣṭhā, a rite of very rare occurrence.

It is also from this center of Āgamic Śaivism that śilpins skilled in the art of carving images have often been commissioned to produce mūrtis meant for installation in newly built temples. Some of these śilpins have made their permanent home there, though they still maintain contact with their native land. The same is the case with the musicians who play during pūjā, on such instruments as the nāgasvaram or the druṇ. Experts in this field are still invited from south India to provide music during Utsava rites.

Religious discourses, popularly known as kathākālak ṣeṣa, are given in the temples on various special occasions. These discourses do not necessarily bear any ritualistic stamp on them, yet they have their special place in the scheme of temple worship, which is mainly meant for the average devotees who is far from the path of jñāna. They are helpful for disseminating religious knowledge among the masses. These discourses are mainly based on the Epics and the Purāṇas, from which passages are liberally quoted. The Puranic events themselves may sometimes from the theme of the kathā-kathākālakṣeṣas. Experts of such events might not be locally available, so they are invited from South India to give performances. It may be pointed out that the religious practices in some temples of the north are guided entirely by authorities in south Indian temples. For instance, when there is any controversy regarding the dates of the rituals or relating to their actual performance, the priests officiating at the temples appeal for guidance to the authorities in charge of the temples in south India and Sri Lanka. Even today, Śiva

temples across India constantly refer to temples in south India for the clarification of doubts relating to the rites.

Temple Employees

Before proceeding to the description of the various rites performed in these temples, a brief account may be given of the temple employees and their duties. Even the smallest temples in the South, and Sri Lanka with very limited financial resources have the following minimum employees.

Temple Manager (Dharmakartā)

The first to be mentioned is the temple manager, who is in charge of the administration of the temple. He is called the dharmakartā, and this title is indicative of his functions. He is the highest authority of the temple and decides upon all matters relating to the temple rites, both daily and special. Of course, he always does this in consultation with the officiating priests.

Priest (Arcaka)

The arcaka in charge of the actual rituals is known by various designations, such as bhaṭṭa, ācārya and guru. He has to qualify himself for the various functions which he performs by going through the prescribed dikṣās such as samayadikṣā, viśeṣa-dikṣā, and nirvāṇa-dikṣā. Before engaging himself in the pūjā which he performs for the benefit of others (parārtha-pūjā), he has to perform some pūjā for his own sake (ātmārtha-pūjā) [1].

The temple arcaka performs the daily pūjās, which consist of abhiṣeka, alaṅkāra, the offerings of the naivedya, and the waving of the dīpas (dīpārādhana). He also performs the arcanā rites whenever he is requested to do so by devotees. On special occasions he has other functions to perform. Of course, on all such occasions he is assisted by the paricāraka, the pācaka and the adhyayana - bhaṭṭa, to all of whom are assigned their respective functions. In small temples, the functions of the pācaka and the paricāraka are combined into one and are discharged by the same assistant. He has to cook the naivedya offerings, provide water for bathing the image, place the various materials of worship like puṣpa, candana and akṣata where needed and always stand beside the arcaka to help him in the performance of the pūjā. He lights the dīpas when the ārādhana requires them. He looks after the lamps in the garbhagrha and sees that they are constantly supplied with oil and wicks until the end of the

day's programme. He accompanies the chief priest on his rounds to make the pūjā offerings to the parivāra-devatās installed at various points in the temple. It is also his responsibility to sweep, clean and wash the inner shrines like the garbhagrha and ardha-maṇḍapa at the appropriate moments set apart for such functions.

Adhyayana - Bhaṭṭa

The adhyayana Bhaṭṭa has an important function to perform. He recites the appropriate Āgamic and Vedic mantras [1] over the course of the performance of the rites. The Śatarudriya, Puruṣa-sūkta, camaka, pañcāśānti, ghoṣa-śānti, and other important sūktas are recited during the abhiṣeka hours. The waving of each dīpa [1] is done to the accompaniment of a separate Vedic formula. The adhyayana - bhaṭṭa also repeats the names of the gods during the arcanā ceremony. At the end of the dīpārādhana, he recites aloud representative extracts from the four Vedas.

The adhyayanabhaṭṭa should possess a thorough knowledge of the Vedas, and he is expected to have received adequate instruction in the art of their recitation. In connection with the performance of special rites he also must recite the relevant Vedic mantras. Wherever possible, assisted by other priests possessing similar training and experience, he accompanies the procession of the image on festival days and recites extracts from the Vedas. Such Vedapārāyaṇa is done quite elaborately in the temples of south India and Sri Lanka. Experts in Vedic recitation from themselves into separate groups – one for each Veda – and then recite the Vedas in a chorus. The Vedādhyāyins always first study texts of the Vedic śākhā to which they belong. This always takes a good deal of time; consequently, they have little time at their disposal to study the texts of the other śākhās. It therefore often becomes necessary to appoint different experts to represent different Vedic śākhās. The Atharva-veda, it may be mentioned, has no place in this scheme of Vedic recitation.

Sādhakācārya

The Sādhakācārya employed in the temples assists the chief priest in various ways, mainly by reading out from time to time the relevant parts of the Paddhati during the performance of the rituals. The Paddhati recited indicate the proper sequence of rites for their performer. The Paddhati also gives the Śaivāgamic mantras to be recited.

These mantras are of Vedic origin, the adhyayana-bhāṭṭa recites them. The services of the sādḥaka are of course not required for the daily rites, but his assistance on special occasions is quite essential, for the rites to be performed on such occasions are lengthy and complicated, and since they are only performed occasionally, the chief priest cannot be expected to remember their every minute detail.

Musician

The musicians who play on the maṅgalavādyas are permanent and daily employees of the temple. [1] However, wherever possible, expert artists are invited on special occasions or festivals.

Garland Maker

There is also the garland maker who supplies garlands (mālās) for daily worship. He also collects those flowers, [1] leaves, samidh, darbha-blades, and bilva needed for the daily pūjā.

Incharge Of Storeroom

A regular employee in charge of the storeroom maintains a stock of all the pūjā-dravyas. He also attends to various other functions, like ringing the bell during pūjā hours, sweeping the temple premises, decorating the floors with raṅgavalli, lighting the lamps set in places other than the garbhagrha and ardha-mandapa, and so on. In certain temples if resources permit, these functions are assigned to different employees.

Pūjā Utensils

A reference may be at this stage to the pūjā utensils. These utensils are normally made of metals, varying from temple to temple according to their financial resources. Some temples use copper, some brass, others silver or even gold. In some temples, all these metals are used for among the utensils. The kalaśa, the dīpa, the nīrājana-dīpa and the handle of the bell are made of silver. The upacāras, such as the darpaṇa, chatra, cāmara (the handle only), vyajana and tālabranda, are also made of silver. There are a few temples in which most of the dīpārādhana are made of silver. The bhasmapātra, in which the holy ash is kept, is invariably made of silver. The saṅkha used for the abhiṣeka and the pūjā-rites is covered with golden plates. The rhinoceros or bull śṅga used in the abhiṣeka rite is covered with ornamental work in silver. In the shrines are brass lamps. The small ghaṅṭā used for the pūjā rites

is made of an appropriate alloy so that it can produce a pleasant resonant sound. The vessels used for the water required for the abhiṣeka are made of copper.

Articles of daily abhiṣeka and alaṅkāra

The articles needed daily for the abhiṣeka are oil, rice flour, turmeric powder, pañcagavya, pañcāmṛta, milk, curd, fruits and coconut water. The udvartana or the towel for drying the image after the snapana is also made available. The articles required for the daily alaṅkāra are garments and ornaments; kavacas or coverings made of silver or gold are also sometimes used. These kavacas, studded with precious gems, are fitted onto the images in such a manner that the original shape of the image is in no way affected. They bear the features of the original, and are skillfully made by the śilpin to fit exactly. In certain places, kavacas are provided only for certain parts of the body, such as hands, feet, chest, etc. Naivedya [1] consist of offering the cooked food to the god during the pūjā rites. Śuddhodana or plain cooked rice is the most common article of food offered in daily rites. The offering made at noon consists of rice, cury, dhal, curds, and so on – which constitute the normal noon meal for most south Indians and Srilankans. Apūpa, lāja, milk, plantains, nālikera, betel and arccanut are among other naivedya articles offered at the various pūjās. On special occasions, a rich variety of citrāna, such as dadhyodana, tintriṇyodana, etc., is offered as naivedya.

Dīpārādhana

The dīpārādhana consists of waving the dīpas in front of the image. The wicks fitted on these lamps are lit by the paricāraka and given to the arcaka. The dīpas are displayed in the prescribed order. Dhūpa is first offered, then follows the dīpa with a single wick. The naivedya is offered with the appropriate mantras, Vedic and non Vedic, and with the display of the mudrās prescribed for the pañcaprāṇahuti. The alaṅkāradīpa is the first to be displayed, lifted with the bottom handle. The dīpa has three to nine levels, each with several wicks. The circular levels are of decreasing diameters up the dīpa, with proportionally fewer wicks as well. The number of levels of the dīpa is always odd, so that there are three, five, seven or nine levels in all. The wicks used are very small and are fed with sufficient oil so that they burn as long as needed. Nāgadīpa, vṛṣabhadīpa, bilvadīpa and kumbhadīpa are among the dīpas used daily for waving.

[1] The wicks in these lamps are so arranged that, when they are lit, the various figures after which the dīpas are named become clearly manifest through the lit wicks. Each dīpa has its specific Āgamic and Vedic mantra which is to be recited when waving that dīpa.

The mode of waving the lamps is prescribed in the ritual texts. [1] The dīpa is first held high up against the forehead of the image, then at the level of the eyes, then of the mouth, the neck, the hands, and the feet. The final waving, which should describe a praṇava in front of the images, marks the end of the āraḍhanā performed with that dīpa. The other dīpas also are then displayed in the same manner.

Upacāras

The dīpārādhana is followed by the offerings of the upacāras like darpaṇa, chatra, cāmara, vyajana and tālavṛnta. These upacāras also are displayed in more or less the same manner as the dīpas. This is then followed by arcanā, the offering of flowers with the recital of the names of the god. Each name is put in the dative case and is followed by the word namaḥ (eg. Śivāya namaḥ, Maheśvarāya namaḥ, Śaṅbhava namaḥ, and so on). Usually, the one hundred and eight names are thus recited. Puspāñjala is offered to the accompaniment of a Vedic mantra. This is followed by the pañcārṭika, which marks the end of the pūjā. Then follows the symbolical recital first of the four Vedas and then of the Śrauta-sūtras. Then come benedictions and the singing of Tamil devotional songs composed by the saints of south India. Except for this occasional singing of devotional songs in Tamil, the proceedings of the rituals are entirely conducted in Sanskrit, and the mantras employed are taken either from the Vedas or from the Āgamas. When the recitals mentioned above are over, vibhūti, candana, and tīrtha are distributed among the devotees as prasāda of the god.

Daily Programme Of Rituals.

A more or less detailed statement may now be made regarding the daily programme of the rituals normally performed in the leading Śaiva temples in South India and Sri Lanka.

The uṣāḥkāla-pūjā marks the beginning of the day's programme. The doors of the garbhagrha are opened to the accompaniment of the blowing of a conch, the ringing of a bell and playing auspicious musical instruments. The

priest and his assistants enter the temple after bathing and performing the sandhyopāsana. Worship is first offered to Bhairava, and keys of the inner shrine are obtained. The pūjā in this connection is performed with simple dīpārādhana and naivedya. The doors of the garbhagrha are opened as indicated earlier. The uṣāḥkāla-pūjā begins with the dīpārādhana and the naivedya offering made to Śakti, then is performed the āraḍhana of Śiva. This sequence is the reverse of that which had been followed for the pūjā the previous night.

Many temples are provided with the śayana-grha. The god and the goddess are roused from sleep by soft music and by devotional songs imploring to the divinities to awaken. The images of the god and the goddess are then mounted on a śibikā and, to their respective places.

The prātaḥkāla-pūjā is performed then the parivāra deities installed in the temple are offered pūjā. The stone images are all bathed with water and dressed with garments, candana and garlands. The chief deities, Śiva and Śakti, are elaborately bathed. In a few temples Rudrakumbha [1] is installed, and after the abhiṣeka is over but before the udvartana, the contents of the kumbha are poured on the liṅga. The abhiṣeka is followed by alaṅkāra. The pūjā proceeds with the offering of naivedya, dhūpa, dīpa and karpūrārtika to Gaṇeśa. The pūjā offered to Śiva is elaborate, as the one performed in honour of Śakti. It is also characterized by offering of naivedya, dīpas and karpūrārtika.

The noontime madhyāhna-pūjā is characterized by abhiṣeka, alaṅkāra, naivedya, and dīpārādhana. The pūjās are only offered to the main deities. A curtain is then dropped and the doors are closed, to be opened again in the evening for the sāyaṅkāla-pūjā.

The sāyaṅkāla-pūjā is offered to Gaṇeśa, Śiva and Śakti. The abhiṣeka, alaṅkāra, naivedya, and elaborate dīpārādhana are the main characteristics of this pūjā. It is usually attended by a large number of devotees, who find the hour quite suitable to gather and offer worship in a leisurely manner. The interval between this pūjā and the next, which is performed about three hours later, is mostly filled by the priest performing arcanās for the devotees. The arcanās performed in the temples sometimes consist of the repetition of one hundred and eight or one thousand names. In certain temples, arcanās are performed by offering one lakh of flowers characterized by abhiṣeka,

alambhāra, naivedya, and dīpāradhana. The naivedya offered at this pūjā consists of pāyasa and māṣāpūpa. The pūjā is confined to Śiva, Śakti and Kṣetrapāla. It is to this last divinity that the keys of the garbhagrha are ritualistically entrusted overnight. The temples provided with a śayana-maṇḍapa celebrate the daily utsava of the procession of the image to the accompaniment of the maṅgalavādyā and other honours. After the images of Śiva and Śakti are finally taken to the śayana-maṇḍapa, they are left reclining on couches arranged with mattresses and pillows. The couch is sometimes set on a swing (dolā), which is rocked as music is played. The doors of the śayana-maṇḍapa remain closed until the following morning.

The details of daily rituals as outlined above vary from temple to temple. Most temples, lacking in adequate funds, cannot afford any elaborate performance of rituals. As far as the regular performance of the rituals even in their bare outlines is concerned, only the big rich temples can properly afford it.

2. CONCLUSION

A brief survey of Śaiva temples ritual and temple worship would lead one to the following conclusions:

the temples of South India and Srilanka are structurally similar in their essence. The scenes portrayed on the domes of all the temples, as well as those depicted on some pillars and walls, are derived from Epic and Purāṇic sources. The pūjā ritual, consisting of the offering of flowers, candana, incense, abhiṣeka, etc., represents but the elaboration of the pūjā described in the Purāṇas.

It is based directly on the Śaivagamas, which have carried out such elaboration to the utmost degree. For their rituals, the priests in Śaiva temples employ mantras taken from the Āgamas and Vedas, which are assigned a high status among the religious texts. It should therefore be seen that, except for some minor differences which are bound to exist due to a lack of facilities or other circumstances, the Śaiva rituals are similarly performed from temple to temple in South India and Srilanka.

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